

AN  
EXAMINATION  
OF  
PRESIDENT  
EDWARDS'  
INQUIRY  
INTO THE  
FREEDOM OF  
THE WILL.

BY

ALBERT  
TAYLOR  
BLEDSE.

“Man, as the minister and interpreter of nature, does and understands as much as his observations on the order of nature, either with regard to things or the mind, permit him, and neither knows more, nor is capable of more.”—*Novum Organum*.

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TO  
THE REV. WILLIAM  
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AS A TOKEN  
OF ADMIRATION FOR  
HIS GENIUS,

AND  
AFFECTIONATE REGARD  
FOR HIS VIRTUES,

This little Volume  
IS RESPECTFULLY  
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EXAMINATION  
OF  
EDWARDS ON THE  
WILL.

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

I ENTERED upon an examination of the “Inquiry” of President Edwards, not with a view to find any fallacy therein, but simply with a desire to ascertain the truth for myself. If I have come to the conclusion, that the whole scheme of moral necessity which Edwards has laboured to establish, is founded in error and delusion; this has not been because I came to the examination of his work

with any preconceived opinion. In coming to this conclusion I have disputed every inch of the ground with myself, as firmly and as resolutely as I could have done with an adversary. The result has been, that the views which I now entertain, in regard to the philosophy of the will, are widely different from those usually held by the opponents of moral necessity, as well as from those which are maintained by its advocates.

The formation of these views, whether they be correct or not, has been no





free agency, that logic is in favour of his system, while consciousness only is in favour of ours ? One reason of this opinion is, that it has been taken for granted, that either the scheme of President Edwards or that of his opponents must be true; and hence, his system has appeared to stand upon immoveable ground, in so far as logic is concerned, only because he has, with such irresistible power and skill, demolished and trampled into ruins that of his adversaries. Reason has been supposed to be on his side, because he has so

clearly shown that it is not on the side of his opponents. But the scheme of the motive-determining power, does not necessarily arise out of the ruins of the self-determining power; it is only to the imagination that it appears to do so. Because the one system is false, it does not follow that the other is true.

There is another and still more powerful reason for the idea in question. The advocates of free agency have granted too much. The great foundation principles of the scheme of moral necessity have been









just as it has been created by the Almighty Architect; we must view the intellectual system of the world, not as it is seen through our hasty and careless conceptions, but as it is revealed to us in the light of consciousness and severe meditation. This will be no light task, I am aware; but whosoever would seek the truth on such a subject, must not expect to find it by light and trifling efforts; he must go after it in all the loving energy of his soul. Let this course be pursued, honestly and perseveringly

pursued, and I am persuaded, that a system of truth will be revealed to the mind, to which it will not be constrained to render “a reluctant homage,” but which, by harmonizing the deductions of logic with the dictates of nature, will secure to itself the most pleasing and delightful homage of which the human mind is susceptible.

Those false conceptions which are common to the human mind, those “idols of the tribe,” of which Bacon speaks, have been, as it is well known, the sources of some of the most



adversaries may appeal to opposite truths; but neither can ever arrive at the truth, and the whole truth. This has appeared to me to be the case, with respect to the long controverted question of liberty and necessity.

The above causes, conspiring with some instances of false logic, which have been overlooked amid so much that is really conclusive, and also with a number of unsound, yet plausible, devices to reconcile the scheme of moral necessity with the reality of virtue and free-agency, have, in







## SECTION 1: OF THE POINT IN CONTROVERSY.

IT is worse than a waste of time, it is a grievous offence against the cause of truth, to undertake to refute an author without having taken pains to understand exactly what he teaches. In every discussion, the first thing to be settled is the point in dispute; and if this be omitted, the controversy must needs degenerate into a mere idle logomachy. It seldom happens that anything affords so much



strongest motive, says another. But although the issue is thus made up in general terms, it is very far from being settled with any tolerable degree of clearness and precision; ample room is still left for all that loose and declamatory kind of warfare in which so many controversialists delight to indulge.

The question still remains to be settled, what is meant by determining the will? In regard to this point, the necessitarian does not seem to have a very clear and definite idea. "The

object of our Inquiry,” says President Day, “is not to learn whether the mind acts at all. This no one can doubt. Nor is it to determine *why we will at all*. The very nature of the faculty of the will implies that we put forth volitions. But the real point of inquiry is, *why we will one way rather than another; why we choose one thing rather than its opposite*,” p. 42. One would suppose from this statement, that we have nothing to do with the question, *why we put forth volitions*, but exclusively with the



faculty of the will but, in the very next, we are informed that we have to inquire into this point also. One moment, only one of these points is in dispute, and the next, both are put in controversy. Surely, this does not indicate any very clear and definite idea, on the part of President Day, as to the point at issue.

The notion of President Edwards, on this subject, appears to be equally unsteady and vacillating. "Thus," says he, "by determining the will, if the phrase be used with any meaning, *must be*







why it exerts such an act, and not another; or why it acts with such a particular determination?" This clearly implies, that although the question, "How a spirit comes to act," is not chiefly concerned in the present controversy; yet *it is partly* concerned in it. This question is concerned in it, though not *so much* as the other question, why the act of the mind is as it is, rather than otherwise.

This is not all. When Edwards attacks the doctrine of his adversaries, in regard to the

determining of the will, he never seems to dream of the idea, which, according to himself, if the phrase mean anything, *must* be attached to it. He treats it as a settled point, that by determining the will must be intended, not causing volition to be one way rather than another, but causing it to come into existence. He could take this expression to mean the one thing or the other, just as it suited his purpose.

Are these two questions really distinct? Can there be one cause of volition, and another cause of its



direction, and not another ; because it is impossible for a body to move without moving in a particular direction. After one force has put a body in motion, another force, it is true, may change its direction; but in such a case, it is not correct to say, that one force caused its motion and another the direction of that motion. For, in reality, both the motion of the body and its direction, result from the joint action of the two forces; or, in other words, each force contributes to the motion, and each to its direction.

Both the motion and its direction are caused by what is technically called, in mechanical philosophy, the “resultant” of the two forces; and the case is really not different, so far as the distinction in question is concerned, from the case of motion produced by the action of a single force. The absurdity of this distinction consists, in supposing that a body may be put in motion without moving in a particular direction; and that something else beside the cause of its motion, is necessary to account for













will follow, that he chose to build up his scheme under one aspect of it, and to defend it under another aspect thereof; that as the architect of his system, he chose to assume and occupy the position, that motive is the cause of volition itself; yet as the defender of it, he sometimes preferred to present this same position under the far milder aspect, that although “the activity of spirit, may be the cause why it acts,” yet motive is the cause why its acts are thus and thus limited, &c. In other words,

it will follow, that his doctrine possesses two faces, and that with the one it looks sternly on the scheme of necessity, whilst, with the other, it seems to smile on its adversaries.

The truth is, the great question which President' Edwards discusses throughout the Inquiry, as we shall see, is "How a spirit comes to act and the other question, "why its action is thus and thus limited," &c., which, on occasion, swells out into such immense importance, as to seem to cover the whole field of vision,







appear ridiculous, seriously contend that he holds mind to be the efficient, or producing cause of volition? There be pretended followers and blind admirers of President Edwards, who, knowing but little of his work themselves, are ever ready to defend him, whensoever attacked, even by those who have devoted years to the study of the Inquiry, by most ignorantly and flippantly declaring that they do not understand him. These pseudo-disciples will not listen to the charge, that Edwards





## SECTION 2: OF EDWARDS' USE OF THE TERM CAUSE.

WE have already seen that Edwards must be understood as holding motive to be the cause of volition; but still we cannot make up the issue with him, until we have ascertained in what sense he employs the term *cause*. It has been contended, by high authority, that he did not regard motive as the efficient, or producing cause of volition, but only as the occasion or condition on which volition

is produced. Hence, it becomes necessary to examine this point, and to settle the meaning of the author, in order that I may not be supposed to misrepresent him, and to dispute with him only about words.

The above notion is based on the following passage:

“I would explain,” says President Edwards, “how I would be understood when I use the word *cause* in this discourse; since, for want of a better word, I shall have occasion to use it in a sense which is more extensive, than that in









this, he triumphantly demands, "Now, does Dr. West deny, that motive is an antecedent, on which volition, either in whole or in part depends? or that it is a ground or reason, either in whole or in part, either by positive influence or not, why it is rather than not ? Surely, he cannot with consistency deny this, since he says, 'By motive we understand the *occasion*, end or design, which an agent has in view when he acts.' So that, however desirous Dr. West may be to be thought to differ, in this point, from



President Edwards, it appears that he most exactly agrees with him," p. 65.

Now, if Edwards really believed that motive is merely the occasion on which the mind acts, agreeing herein most perfectly with Dr. West, why did he not say so? Why adhere to the term cause, which can only obscure such an idea, instead of adopting the word occasion, or condition, or antecedent, which would have clearly expressed it? Surely, if Edwards maintained the doctrine

















exceedingly “desirous of being thought to differ with President Edwards” on this subject, yet I do “most exactly agree with him.”

To begin then;—if motive is merely the condition on which the mind acts, and exerts no influence in the production of volition, it is certainly improper to say, that it *gives rise to volition*. This clearly implies that it is the efficient, or producing cause of volition. On this point, let the younger Edwards himself be the judge. “That self-determination *gives rise to volition*,” is an expression









according to the Inquiry; it is not merely the condition on which it is produced.

The younger Edwards declares, that President Edwards did not regard “motive as the efficient cause of volition,” p. 66, but only as the “occasion or previous circumstances necessary to volition;” in this respect “most exactly agreeing with Dr. West” himself; and yet he tells us, in another place, that “every cause of volition is included in President Edwards’ definition of motive,” p. 104. Now, does not every cause of volition



He regarded the Deity as the sole fountain of all efficiency in heaven and in earth. Hence, if the definition of President Edwards included “every cause” of volition; it must have included this divine influence, this efficient cause. Indeed, the younger Edwards expressly asserts, that this “divine influence” is included in President Edwards’ “explanation of his idea of motive,” p. 104. He tells us, then, that President Edwards regards motive as merely the *occasion* of volition; and yet that he considered



motive as including the efficient cause of volition! At one time, motive is merely the antecedent, which exerts no influence; at another, it embraces the efficient cause! At one time, the author of the Inquiry “most exactly agrees” with the libertarian in regard to this all-important point; and, at another, he most perfectly disagrees with him! It is to be hoped, that President Edwards is not quite so glaringly inconsistent with himself, on this subject, as he is represented to be by his distinguished son.











all this taken together, but to inform us, that he sometimes uses the word in question *very absurdly*, in order to keep us from finding fault with him? The truth is, that whatever apparent concession President Edwards may have made, he does habitually bring down the term *cause* to its narrow and restrained sense, to its strict and proper meaning, when he says, that motive is the cause of volition. He loses sight entirely of the idea, that it is only the *occasion* on which the mind acts.







*positive influence ?” Such a pretext would amount to nothing; for Edwards has said, that “motives excite volition and “to excite, is to be a cause in the most proper sense, not merely a negative occasion, but a ground of existence by positive influence,” p. 96.*

An efficient cause is properly defined by the Edwardses themselves. “Does not the man talk absurdly and inconsistently,” says the younger Edwards, “who asserts, that a man is the efficient cause of his own volitions, yet puts forth no



*cause* is “often used in so restrained a sense as to signify only that which has a *positive efficiency* or *influence* to *produce* a thing, or *bring it to pass*.”

That President Edwards regarded motive as the efficient or producing cause of volition, according to his own notion of it, is clear not only from numerous passages of the Inquiry; it is also wrought into the very substance and structure of his whole argument. It is involved in his very definition of the strongest motive. The strongest motive, says he,





without an efficient cause, by which it is brought into existence. When we reason from those things which begin to be up to God, we clearly reason from effects to their efficient causes. Hence, when this maxim is applied by Edwards to volitions, he evidently refers to the efficient causes of them. If he does not, his maxim is misapplied; for it is established in one sense, and applied in another. If it proves anything, it proves that volition must have an efficient cause; and when motive is taken to be that

cause, it is taken to be the efficient cause of volition.

This is not all. Edwards undertakes to point out the difference between natural and moral necessity. In the case of moral necessity, says he, “the cause with which the effect is connected is of a particular kind: viz., that which is of a moral nature; either some previous habitual disposition, or some motive presented to the understanding. And the effect is also of a particular kind, being likewise of a moral nature; consisting in some inclination or volition











charge. Truly, if he held the doctrine ascribed to him, we might have expected to find some allusion to it in his attempts to refute such a charge. If such had been his doctrine, with what ease might he have repelled the charge in question, and shown its utter futility, by simply alleging that, according to his system, motive is the occasion, and not the producing cause, of volition? Instead of the many pages through which he has so laboriously struggled, in order to bring our ideas of free-agency and virtue into harmony

with his scheme; with what infinite ease might a single word have brought his scheme into harmony with the common sentiments of mankind in regard to free-agency and virtue! Indeed, if Edwards really believed that motive is merely the condition on which the mind acts, nothing can be more wonderful than his profound silence in regard to it on such an occasion; except the great pains which, on all occasions, he has taken to keep it entirely in the back-ground. If the younger Edwards is not mistaken as to the true

import of his father's doctrine, then, instead of setting it forth in a clear light, so that it may be read of all men, the author of the Inquiry has, indeed, enveloped it in such a flood of darkness, that it is no wonder those who have been so fortunate as to find it out, should be so frequently called upon to complain that his opponents do not understand him. Indeed, if such be the doctrine of the Inquiry, I do not see how any man can possibly understand it, unless he has inherited some peculiar

power, unknown to the rest of mankind, by which its occult meaning may be discerned, notwithstanding all the outward appearances by which it is contradicted and obscured. The plain truth is, as we have seen, that President Edwards holds motive to be the producing cause of volition. According to his scheme, “Volitions are necessarily connected with the influence of motives they “are brought to pass by the prevailing and effectual influence” of motives. Motive is “the effectual power and







he only reconciles it with the semblance of these things, whilst he denies their substance, I shall not be diverted from an opposition to so monstrous a system, by the fair appearances it may be made to wear to the outward eye.

### **SECTION 3: THE INQUIRY INVOLVED IN A VICIOUS CIRCLE.**

THE great doctrine of the Inquiry seems to go round in a vicious circle, to run into an insignificant





consequently has a cause. The great question, according to his work, is, what is this cause? He says it is the strongest motive; in the definition of which he includes everything that in any way contributes to the production of volition ; in other words, the strongest motive is made to embrace everything that acts as a cause of volition. This is the way in which he explains himself, as well as the manner in which he is understood by others. Thus, says the younger Edwards, “in his explanation of his idea of



circumstances which aid in the production of volition; but still he is quite sure, that the whole of that which operates to produce a volition does actually produce it! Though he may have failed to show wherein consists the strength of motives; yet he contends that the strongest motive, or the cause of volition, is really and unquestionably the cause of volition! Such is the great doctrine of the Inquiry.

If this is what the Inquiry means to establish, surely it rests upon unassailable



ground. Well may President Day assert, that “to say a weaker motive prevails against a stronger one is to say, that that which has the least influence has the greatest influence,” p. 66. Now who would deny this position of the learned president? Who would say, that that which has the greatest influence has not the greatest influence? Surely, this great doctrine is to the full as certain as the newly discovered axiom of professor Villant, that “a thing is equal to itself !”

President Day, following









foundations quite  
unsettled.

Motives, as they are called, are different from each other in nature and in kind; and hence, it were absurd to compare them in degree. “The strongest motive,” therefore, is a mode of expression which can have no intelligible meaning, unless it be used with reference to the influence which motives are supposed to exert over the mind. This is the sense in which it clearly seems to be used by Edwards. The distinguishing property of a motive, according to his







cannot know what motive has this greatest degree of previous tendency or advantage, except by observing what motive actually does determine the will.

This leads us to another view of the same subject. The strength of a motive, as President Edwards properly remarks, depends upon the state of the mind to which it is addressed. Hence, in a great majority of cases, we can know nothing about the relative strength of motives, except from the actual influence which they exert over the

mind of the individual upon whom they are brought to bear. This shows that the universal proposition, that the will is *always* determined by the strongest motive, can be known to be true, only by assuming that the strongest motive is that by which the will is determined.

The same thing may be made to appear from another point of view. It has been well said by the philosopher of Malmsbury, “that experience concludeth nothing universally.” From









The Inquiry itself furnishes abundant evidence, that I have done its author no injustice. “I have chosen,” says he, “rather to express myself thus, *that the will always is as the greatest apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable*, than to say the will is determined by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable; because an appearing most agreeable to the mind, and the mind’s preferring, seem scarcely distinct. If strict propriety of speech be insisted on, it may more properly be said,























much, but all, of its own evidence along with it. Who can deny that a man always does what he pleases, when he does what he pleases? This truth appears with just as great clearness at the beginning, as it does at the conclusion, of the celebrated Inquiry of the author. It is invested in a flood of light, which can neither be increased by argument, nor obscured by sophistry.

From the foregoing remarks, it appears, I think, that the fundamental doctrine of the Inquiry is a barren truism, or a vicious



















## SECTION 4: VOLITION NOT AN EFFECT.

THE argument of the Inquiry, as I have shown, assumes that a volition is an effect in the proper sense of the word; that it is the correlative of an efficient cause. If it were necessary, this point might be established by a great variety of additional considerations; but, I presume that every candid reader of the Inquiry is fully satisfied in relation to it.

If we mean by an effect,



else, in the same manner that an effect, properly so called, proceeds from its efficient cause.

This is a point on which I desire to be distinctly understood. I put forth a volition to move my hand. The motion of the hand follows. Now, here I observe the action of the mind, and also the motion of the hand. The effect exists in the body, in that which is by nature passive ; the cause in that which is active, in the mind. The effect produced in the body, in the hand, is the passive result of the prior



action of mind. Or, in other words, I contend that action is the invariable antecedent of bodily motion, but not of volition; that whatever may be its relations to other things, a volition does not sustain the same relation to anything in the universe, that an effect sustains to its efficient cause, that a passive result sustains to the direct prior action by which it is produced. I hope I maybe *always* so understood, when I affirm that a volition is not an effect.

It is in this narrow and

restricted sense that Edwards assumes a volition to be an effect. He does not say, in so many words, that the mind cannot put forth a volition, except in the way of producing it by a preceding volition or act of the will; but he first assumes a volition to be an effect; and then he asserts, that the mind can be the cause of no *effect*, (italicizing the term effect,) except by the prior action of the mind. Thus, having assumed a volition to be an effect, he takes it for granted that it cannot proceed from the







but he also says, that the mind can “bring no *effects* to pass, but what are consequent upon its acting,” p. 56. And again he says, “The will determines which way the hands and feet shall move, by an act of choice; and *there is no other way* of the will’s determining, directing, or commanding anything at all.” This is very true, if a volition is such an effect as requires the prior action of something else to account for its production, just as the motion of the “hands and feet” requires the action of the mind to





cause by which it was brought into existence. That is to say, it *must* be an effect. True, it must be an effect, if you please ; but in what sense of the word ? Is volition an effect, in the same sense that the motion of the body is an effect ? This is the question.

And this question, I contend, is not to be decided by abstract considerations, nor yet by the laying of words together, and drawing conclusions from them. It is a question, not of logic, but of psychology. By whatever name you may



proud syllogistic method of the schools, and betake ourselves to the humble task of observation—of patient, severe, and scrutinizing observation. There is no other condition on which we can “enter into the kingdom of man, which is founded in the sciences.” There is no other course marked out for us by the immortal Bacon: and if we pursue any other we may wander in the dazzling light of a thousand abstractions, and behold whatever fleeting images of grandeur and of beauty we may be pleased to conjure





action or influence of its cause; and that nothing is any further an effect, than as it proceeds from that action or influence. The subject in which it is produced, is always passive as to its production; and just in so far as it is itself active, it is not the subject of an effect, but the author of an action. Such is the idea of an effect in the true and proper sense of the word.

Now does our idea of a volition correspond with this idea of an effect? Is it produced in the mind, and is the mind passive as to its

production? Is it, like the motion of a body, the passive result of the action of something else? No. It is not the result of action; it is action itself. The mind is not passive as to its production ; it is in and of itself an action of the mind. It is not *determined* ; it is a *determination*. It is not a produced effect, like the motion of body; it is itself an original producing cause. It does seem to me, that if any man will only reflect on this subject, he must see that there is a clear and manifest difference between an ACT



the influence of its cause.

And yet, in reference to volitions, he often uses the expression, “*this sort of effects*,” as if it did not exactly correspond with the “very idea of an effect,” from which it is absurd to depart in our conceptions. When he gives fair play to consciousness, he speaks of different kinds of effects; and yet, when he returns to his theory and his reasoning, all this seems to vanish; and there remains but one clear, fixed, and definite idea of an effect, and to speak of anything else as such is absurd. He





*is to cause in the most proper sense, not merely a negative occasion, but a ground of existence by positive influence,”* p. 96.

These passages, which are scattered up and down through the Inquiry, in which the doctrine of liberty seems to be conceded, I cannot but regard as highly important concessions. They have been used to show that we misconceive the scheme of Edwards, when we ascribe to him the doctrine of fate. But when they are thus adduced, to show that we misrepresent his doctrine, I

beg it may be remembered that such evidence can prove only one of two things; either that we do not understand what he teaches, or that he is not always consistent with himself.

If he really held the doctrine of fatalism, we ought not to be surprised that he has furnished such evidence against himself. It is not in the nature of the human mind to keep itself always deaf to the voice of consciousness. It is not in the power of any system always to counteract the spontaneous workings of



nature. Though the mind should be surrounded by those deep-seated, all-pervading, and obstinate illusions, by which the scheme of fatalism is made to wear the appearance of self-evident truth; yet when it loses sight of that system, it will, at times, speak out in accordance with the dictates of nature. The stern and unrelenting features of fatalism cannot always be so intimately present to the mind, as entirely to exclude it from the contemplation of a milder and more captivating system of







by the action of force upon it. His philosophy is, therefore, an essentially shallow and superficial philosophy. The great name of Edwards cannot shield it from such condemnation.

## **SECTION 5: OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF REGARDING VOLITION AS AN EFFECT.**

IT has been frequently conceded that a volition is an effect; but to make this concession, without explanation or



thing. Thus, the mind, or the power of the mind, is sometimes said to be the cause of motion in the body; but this is not to speak with philosophical precision. No motion of the body is necessarily connected, either with the mind itself, or with the power of the mind. In other words, if these should lie dormant, or fail to act, they would produce no bodily motion. But let the mind act, or will a particular motion, and the body will necessarily move in consequence of that action. Hence, it is neither with

the mind, nor with the power of the mind, that bodily motion, as an effect, is necessarily connected; it is with an act of the mind or volition that this necessary connection subsists.

A cause is said to imply its effect: it is not the mind, but an act of the mind, that implies motion in the body.

This is evidently the idea of Edwards, when he says, as he frequently does, that an effect is necessarily connected with the *influence* or *action* of its cause. The term *cause* is ambiguous; and when he





it.

Now, if a volition is an effect, if it has an efficient cause, what is that cause? By the *action* of what is it produced? It cannot be by the act of the mind, says Edwards, because the mind can produce an *effect* only by another act. Thus, on the supposition in question, we cannot ascribe a volition to the mind as its cause, without being compelled to admit that it results from a preceding act of the mind. But that preceding act, on the same supposition, will require still another preceding act







say, with equal propriety, that motive can be the cause of no *effect*, except by its action or productive influence. Indeed, Edwards himself expressly says, that motives can do nothing, except by an exertion of their influence, or by operating to produce effects. Thus, the two cases are rendered perfectly parallel; and afford the same foundation on which to erect an infinite series of causes.

To evade this, can it be pretended, that motive just exerts this influence of itself? May we not with



undisputed evidence of consciousness.

The truth is, if we take it for granted, that a volition is an effect, properly so called, and as such must proceed from the prior action of something else, we cannot escape the *ad infinitum* absurdity of the Inquiry. If we rise from this platform, we cannot possibly ascend in any direction, without entering upon an infinite series of causes. Whether we ascend through the self-determining power of the mind, or through the determining power of



motives, or through the joint action of both, we can save ourselves from such an absurd consequence only by a glaring act of inconsistency. Hence, we are forced back upon the conclusion that action may, and *actually does* arise in the world of mind, without any efficient or producing cause of its existence, without resulting from the prior action of anything whatever. Any other hypothesis is involved in absurdity.

Let it be assumed, that a volition is, properly speaking, an effect, and





seems to have endeavored to anticipate and reply to all possible objections to his system; and yet this, which has occurred to so many others, appears not to have occurred to himself, for he has not noticed it.

The younger Edwards has attempted to reply to it. Let us see his reply. “We maintain,” says he, “that action may be the effect of a divine influence ; or that it may be the effect of one or more second causes, the first of which is immediately produced by the Deity. Here then is not



Has it become obsolete?

It may be contended, that although human volition is an effect, and so must have a cause; yet the divine volition is not an effect. The elder Edwards could not have taken this ground; for he contends, that the volition of Deity is just as necessarily connected with the strongest motive, or the greatest apparent good, as is the volition of man. According to the Inquiry, all volitions, both human and divine, are necessarily connected with the greatest apparent good, and in precisely the same manner.

The above pretext, therefore, could not have been set up by him.

This ground, however, is taken by the younger Edwards. "It is granted," says he, "that volition in the Deity is not an effect," p. 122; it has no cause, and here terminates the series. But how is this? Can some event, after all, begin to be without having a cause of its existence? without being an effect? By no means. How is it then? Why, says the learned author, the volitions of the Deity have existed from all eternity! They have no causes;

because they have never begun to be !

“I deny,” says he, “that the operations and energies of the Deity *begin in time*, though the effects of those operations do. They no more begin in time than the divine existence does; but human volitions all begin in time,” p. 123. This makes all the difference imaginable; for as the divine acts have existed from all eternity, so they cannot be caused.

But there is an objection to this view, “If it should be said,” he continues, “that on this supposition the







this mere seeming make any real difference in the case? There is a very short series, we are told, the volition of Deity constituting the first link. Has not this first link, this volition of the Deity, a cause? No. And why? Because it has existed from all eternity; and so nothing could go before it to produce it. Did it not exist long before the effect then, which it produces in time? No. And why? Because in the view of God and in reality, it existed just before its effect, as all causes do, and therefore

there is no real severance of cause and effect in the case! It really comes just before its effect in time, and therefore there is no severance of cause and effect; and yet it really existed before all time, even from all eternity, and therefore it cannot have a cause! Now is this logic, or is it legerdemain?

There is no time with God, says the author; then there is no time in reality; it is all an illusion arising from the succession of our own thoughts. If this be so, then all things do really come to pass











The truth is, we must reason about cause and effect as they appear to us; and whether time be an illusion or not, we must, in all our reasonings, conceive of cause and effect as conjoined in what we call time, or we cannot reason at all. According to the younger Edwards, the act of creation, not the mere purpose to create, but the real causative act of creation, existed in the divine mind from all eternity. Why then did the world spring up and come into existence at one point of time rather than

another? How happened it, that so many ages rolled away, and this mighty causative act produced no effect? In view of such a case, how could the author have said, as he frequently does, that a cause necessarily implies its effect? How can this be, if a causative act of the Almighty may exist, and yet, for millions of ages, its omnipotent energy produce no effect? Indeed, such a doctrine destroys all our notions of cause and effect; it overthrows “the great principle of common sense” that cause and effect

necessarily imply each other; and involves all our reasoning from cause to effect, and *vice versa*, in the utmost perplexity and confusion. It throws clouds and darkness over the whole field of inquiry.

Since the time of Dr. Samuel Clarke, it has been frequently objected to the scheme of moral necessity, that it is involved in the great absurdity of an infinite series of causes. President Edwards urged this objection against the doctrine of the self-determining power; he did not perceive that it lay

against his own scheme of the motive-determining power; and hence, he has not even attempted to answer it. This was reserved for the younger Edwards; and although he has deservedly ranked high as a logician, I cannot but regard his attempt to answer the objection in question, as one of the most remarkable abortions in the history of philosophy.

## **SECTION 6: OF THE MAXIM THAT EVERY EFFECT MUST HAVE A CAUSE.**

IN a former section, I referred to some of the false assumptions which have been incautiously conceded to the necessitarian, and in which he has laid the foundations of his system; but I have not, as yet, alluded to the argument or deduction in which he is accustomed to triumph. This argument, strange as it may seem, is a deduction, not from any

principle or general fact which has been ascertained by observation or experience, but from a self-evident and universal truth.

That every effect must have a cause, is the maxim upon which the necessitarian takes his stand, and from which he delights to draw his favourite conclusion. It may be well, therefore, to examine the argument which has been so frequently erected upon the maxim in question. Although from various considerations, it has been









said that every change has a cause, it is evident that a change is conceived of under the idea of an effect. It is supposed to be produced by a cause, and therefore it must be considered as an effect; and if the idea remains precisely the same, I do not see that giving it a new name, can possibly make any difference in the meaning of the proposition.

The maxim, that every effect must have a cause, is a self-evident and universal proposition. Its truth is involved in the very



of the proposition; inasmuch as an effect is that which is produced by a cause. The very idea of an effect implies its relation to a cause; and to say, that it has one, is only to say, that an effect is an effect. For if it were not produced by a cause, it would not be an effect.

The maxim under consideration is as unquestionably true as any axiom in Euclid. It does not depend for the evidence of its truth upon observation, or experience, or reasoning; it carries its own evidence along with it. No





parts know all the maxims generally made use of in mathematics never so perfectly, and contemplate their extent and consequences as much as he pleases, he will, by their assistance, I suppose, scarce ever come to know, that ‘the square of the hypotenuse in a right-angled triangle, is equal to the squares of the two other sides.’ The knowledge that ‘the whole is equal to the parts,’ and, ‘if you take equals from equals, the remainder will be equal,’ helped him not, I presume, to this

demonstration. And a man may, I think, pore long enough on those axioms, without ever seeing one jot the more of mathematical truths.”

The same doctrine is still more distinctly stated by Dugald Stewart. “If by the first principles of a science,” says he, “be meant those fundamental propositions from which its remoter truths are derived, the axioms cannot, with any consistency, be called the first principles of mathematics. They have not, (it will be admitted,) the most distant analogy to













in the course of his reasoning, the very point which he had undertaken to prove. Accordingly, this has been done; and the tacit assumption of the point in dispute seems not to have been suspected by him.

The justice of this remark may be shown, by a reference to the argument of the necessitarian. When this is reduced to the form of a syllogism, it stands thus: Every effect has a cause; a volition is an effect; and, therefore, a volition has a cause. In the middle term, which







convenient ambiguity of the terms in which it is expressed. The necessitarian never fails to avail himself of this ambiguity. He seems both to himself and to the spectator to be carrying on a “great demonstration and this is one reason, perhaps, why the mind is diverted from the sophistical tricks, the metaphysical jugglery, by which both are deceived. Let us look a little more narrowly at this pretended demonstration.

The maxim in question is applied to volition; every change in nature, even the

voluntary acts of the mind, must have a cause. Now according to Edwards explanation of the term, this is a proposition which, I will venture to say, no man in his right mind ever ventured to deny. It is true, that President Edwards tells us of those, who “imagine that a volition has no cause, or *that it produces itself;*” and he has very well compared this to the absurdity of supposing, “that I gave myself my own being, or that I came into being without a cause,” p. 277. But who ever held such a doctrine? Did any

man, in his right mind, ever contend that “a volition could produce itself,” can arise out of nothing, and bring itself into existence? If so, they were certainly beyond the reach of logic; they stood in need of the physician. I have never been so unfortunate as to meet with any advocate of free-agency, either in actual life or in history, who supposed that a volition arose out of nothing, without *any cause* of its existence, or that it produced itself. They have all maintained, with one consent, that the mind is



Edwards. He tells us, that by cause he sometimes means any antecedent, whether it exerts any positive influence or no. Now, in this sense, it is conceded by the advocates of free-agency, that motive itself is the cause of volition. This is the question: Is motive the efficient, or producing cause of volition? This is the question, I say; but Edwards frequently loses sight of it in a mist of ambiguities; and he lays around him in the dark, with such prodigious strength, that if his

adversaries were not altogether imaginary beings, and therefore impassible to his ponderous blows, I have no doubt he would have slain more of them than ever Samson did of the Philistines.

The manner in which the necessitarian speaks of cause in his maxims, and reasonings, and pretended demonstrations, is of very great service to him. It includes, as we are told, every condition or cause of volition; (what a heterogeneous mass!) every thing without which



while, by affirming, we are made to receive that of our opponents. This way of proposing the doctrine of necessity very strongly reminds one of a certain trick in legislation, by which such things are forced into a bill, that in voting upon it, you must either reject what you most earnestly desire, or else sanction and support what you most earnestly detest. We should, therefore, neither affirm nor deny the whole proposition as it is set forth by the necessitarian; we should touch it with the dissecting



knife, and cure it of its manifold infirmities.

The ambiguity of the term cause is, indeed, one of the most powerful weapons, both of attack and defence, in the whole armory of the necessitarian. Do you affirm the mind to be the cause of volition? Then, forthwith, as if the word could have only one meaning, it is alleged, that if the mind is the cause of volition, it can cause it only by a preceding volition; and so on *ad infinitum*. Hence, your doctrine must needs be absurd; because the word is understood,

yea, and will be understood, in its most restrained and narrow sense. But do you deny motive to be the cause of volition? Then, how absurd are you again ; you are no longer understood to use the word in the same sense; you now mean, not only that motive is not the producing cause of volition, but that there is absolutely nothing upon which it depends for its existence, and that “it produces itself.” Does Edwards affirm that motive is the cause of volition; that motive causes volition to



no. Yea, he gives this information, he declares, to “cut off occasion from any that might seek occasion to cavil and object against his doctrine,” p. 51. These, and many other things of the same kind, are to be found in the writings of Day, and Edwards, and Collins, and Hobbes; and whosoever may be pleased to follow them, through all the doublings and windings of their logic, may do so at his leisure. It is sufficient for my present purpose to remark, that Edwards has included a number of different ideas in his













## **SECTION 7: OF THE APPLICATION OF THE MAXIM THAT EVERY EFFECT MUST HAVE A CAUSE.**

IN the last section I considered the application of the maxim, “that every effect must have a cause,” to the question of necessity. This maxim figures so largely in every scheme of necessity, and it is relied upon with so much confidence, that I shall present some further views respecting its true nature and application. The





circumstances under which it is first suggested to the mind. Whence, then, do we derive the ideas of cause and effect, and of the necessary connection between them?

Locke, it is well known, supposed that we might derive the idea of causation by reflecting on the changes which take place in the external world. The fallacy of this supposition has been fully shown by Hume, and Brown, and Consin. In the refutation of Locke's notion, these celebrated philosophers were undoubtedly right;



that the motion follows the volition. It is this act of the mind, this exertion of the will, that gives us the idea of a cause; and the change which it produces in the body, is that from which we derive the idea of an effect. If we had never experienced a volition, we should never have formed the idea of causation. The idea of positive efficiency, or active power, would never have entered into our minds.

The two terms of the sequence, with which we are thus furnished by an actual experience, is an act









pleased with the noise, it will repeat that stroke with every appearance of a confident expectation that the noise will be repeated also. It counts on the invariableness wherewith the same consequent will follow the same antecedent. In the language of Dr. Thomas Brown, these two terms make up a sequence, and there seems to exist in the spirit of man not an underived, but an aboriginal faith in the uniformity of nature's sequences."—Nat. Theo. p. 121.

Now, the two terms which







are made acquainted with the existence of an intelligent and designing First Cause. We learn the connection between the adaptation of means to an end, and the operations of a designing mind, by reflecting on what passes within ourselves when we plan and execute a work of skill and contrivance. And, as we are so made as to rely with implicit confidence on the uniformity of nature's sequences; so, without further experience or induction, it is impossible for us to conceive of any contrivance whatever,

without conceiving of it as proceeding from the hand of a contriver. Thus, we necessarily rise from the innumerable and wonderful contrivances in nature, to a belief in the existence of an intelligent and designing mind. In like manner may we establish the other attributes of God.

But to return to our maxim. We can only infer, from a change or modification in matter, the existence of an act by which it is produced. The former is the only idea we have of an effect; the latter is the only idea we have of















sequences authorizes him to extend this connection to all sequences where the two terms are the same. That is to say, wherever he discovers a change in body, he is authorized to infer the existence of a prior act by which it was produced. But he does not confine himself to this sequence alone. He does not rest satisfied with the universal principle, that every change in body, or in that which is passive, must proceed from the prior action of something else. He makes a most unwarrantable extension of this principle. He supposes,



















not an effect, are there no effects in the universe? Are we sunk in utter darkness? Have we no platform left whereon to stand, and to behold the glory of God, our Creator and Preserver? Surely we have. Every change throughout inanimate nature bespeaks the agency of Him, who “sits concealed behind his own creation,” but is everywhere manifested by his omnipresent energy. The human body is an effect, teeming with evidences of the most wonderful skill of its Great Cause and Contriver. The













## SECTION 8: OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE FEELINGS AND THE WILL.

IT is well known that Edwards confounds the sensitive part of our nature with the will, the susceptibility by which the mind feels with the power by which it acts. He expressly declares, that “the affections and the will are not two faculties of the soul;” and it is upon this confusion of things that much of his argument depends for its coherency.

But although he thus

expressly confounds them ; yet he frequently speaks of them, in the course of his argument, as if they were two different faculties of the soul. Thus, he frequently asserts that the will is determined by “the strongest appetite,” by “the strongest disposition,” by “the strongest inclination.” Now, in these expressions, he evidently means to distinguish appetite, inclination, and disposition, from the will; and if he does not, then he asserts, that the will is determined by itself, a doctrine which he utterly

repudiates.

The soundness of much of his argument depends, as I have said, upon the confusion or the identification of these two properties of the mind ; the soundness of much of it also depends upon the fact that they are not identical, but distinct. From a great number of similar passages, we may select the following, as an illustration of the justness of this remark: “Moral necessity,” says he, “may be as *absolute*, as natural necessity. That is, the effect may be as powerfully



connected with its moral cause, as a natural necessary effect is with its natural cause. Whether the will in every case is necessarily determined by the strongest motive, or whether the will ever makes any resistance to such a motive, or can ever oppose the strongest present inclination, or not; if that matter should be controverted, yet I suppose none will deny, hut that, in some cases, a previous bias, or inclination, or the motive presented, may be so POWERFUL, THAT THE ACT OF THE WILL MAY

BE CERTAINLY AND  
INDISSOLUBLY

CONNECTED THEREWITH.

When motives or previous bias are very strong, all will allow that there is some *difficulty* in going against them. And if they were yet stronger, the difficulty would be still greater. And, therefore, if more be still added to their strength, to a certain degree, it would make the difficulty so great, that it would be wholly *impossible* to surmount it; for this plain reason, because whatever power men may be supposed to have to

surmount difficulties, yet that power is not infinite; and so goes not beyond certain limits. If a man can surmount ten degrees of difficulty of this kind with twenty degrees of strength, because the degrees of strength are beyond the degrees of difficulty; yet if the difficulty be increased to thirty, or an hundred, or a thousand degrees, and his strength not also increased, his strength will be wholly insufficient to surmount the difficulty. As, therefore, it must be allowed, that there may be such a thing as a *sure* and



*feeling excited in the mind."* Thus, according to President Day, feeling is not volition; it intervenes between the external object and volition. But although Edwards is right in this; there is one thing in which he is wrong. He is wrong in supposing that our feelings possess a real strength, by which they act upon and control the will.

It is obvious that the coherency and force of the above passage depends on the idea, that there is a real power in the strongest inclination or desire of the mind, which renders it













called the “active powers” of the mind. “This distinction,” says Dr. Chalmers, “made by the sagacious Butler between the power of a principle and its authority, enables us in the midst of all the actual anomalies and disorders of our state, to form a precise estimate of the place which conscience naturally and rightly holds in man’s constitution.

The desire of acting virtuously, which is a desire consequent on our sense of right and wrong, may not be of *equal strength* with the desire of



disapprove, our heart, temper, and actions, is not only to be considered as what in its turn is to have some influence, which may be said of every passion, of the basest appetite; but likewise as being superior; as from its very nature manifestly claiming superiority over all others; insomuch that you cannot form a notion of this faculty conscience, without taking in judgment, direction, and superintendency. This is a constituent part of the idea, that is of the faculty itself; and to preside and govern,

from the very economy and constitution of man, belongs to it. Had it *might*, as it has right; had it *power*, as it has manifest authority; it would absolutely govern the world.”

This language, it should be observed, is not used in a metaphorical sense; it occurs in the statement of a philosophical theory of human nature. Similar language is frequently to be found in the writings of the most enlightened advocates of free-agency. Thus, says Jouffroy, even while he is contending

against the doctrine of necessity : “There are two kinds of *moving powers* acting upon us; first, the impulses of instinct, or passion; and, secondly, the conceptions of reason . . . . That these two kinds of moving powers can and do act efficiently upon our volitions, there can be no doubt,” p. 102. If it were necessary, it might be shown, by hundreds of extracts from their writings, that the great advocates of free-agency have held, that the emotions, desires, and passions, do really act on







They would merely be the occasions on which we act. There would be no necessary connexion between what are called motives and their corresponding actions. Our desires or emotions might be under the influence and dominion of external causes, or of causes that are partly external and partly internal; but yet our volitions would be perfectly free from all preceding influences whatever. Our volitions might depend on certain conditions, it is true, such as the possession of certain desires or





has been as general as I have supposed, it is not difficult to account for its prevalence. The fact that a desire, or affection is the indispensable condition, the invariable antecedent, of an act of the will, is of itself sufficient to account for the prevalence of such a notion. Nothing is more common than for men to mistake an invariable antecedent for an efficient cause. This source of error, it is well known, has given rise to some of the most obstinate delusions that have ever infested and enslaved the human mind.



is wrought into the structure of our language; and hence, there is no wonder that it has gained such an ascendancy over our thoughts. It has met us at every turn; it has presented itself to us in a thousand shapes; it has become so familiar, that we have not even stopped to inquire into its true nature. Its dominion has become complete and secure, just because its truth has never been doubted.

The illusion in question, if it be one, has derived an accession of strength from another source. It is a fact,





desire; and that the energy of the action corresponds with the strength of the motive, or moving principle.

Though the principle in question has been so commonly received, I think we should be led to question it in consequence of the conclusions which have been deduced from it. If our desires, affections, &c., operate to influence the will, how can it be free in putting forth volitions? How does Mr. Locke meet this difficulty? Does he tell us, that it arises solely from our mistaking a









again.” This language is employed by Mr. Locke, while attempting to define the idea of liberty or free-agency; and he evidently supposed, as appears from the above passage, as well as from some others, that we frequently cease to be free-agents, in consequence of the irresistible power of our desires or passions.

Dr. Reid set out from the same position, and he arrived at the same conclusion. He frequently speaks of the appetites and passions as so many forces, whose action is “directly

upon the will.” “They draw a man towards a certain object, without any further view, by a sort of violence.”—Essay, p. 18.

“When a man is acted upon by motives of this kind, he finds it easy to yield to the strongest. They are like two forces pushing him in contrary directions. To yield to the strongest, he need only be passive,” p. 237.

“In actions that proceed from appetite and passion, we are passive in part and only in part active. They are therefore in part imputed to the passion; and if it is supposed to be





speak of *actions that are partly passive*; and that in so far as they are passive, he maintained they should not be imputed to the man whose actions they are, but to the passions by which they are produced. This may appear to be strange doctrine for an advocate of free-agency and accountability; but it seems to be the natural and inevitable consequence of the commonly received notion with respect to the relation which subsists between the passions and the will.

The principle that our





shown the impropriety of regarding similar modes of speech as a literal expression of the truth. “To talk of liberty,” says he, “or the contrary, as belonging to the *very will itself*, is not to speak good sense; if we judge of sense, and nonsense, by the original and proper signification of words. For the *will itself* is not an agent that *has a will*: the power of choosing, itself, has not a power of choosing. That which has the power of volition is the man, or the soul, and not the power of volition itself. To be free is

the property of an agent, who is possessed of powers and faculties, as much as to be cunning, valiant, bountiful, or zealous. But *these qualities are the properties of persons, and not the properties of properties.*” This remark, no doubt, is perfectly just, as well as highly important. And it may be applied with equal force and propriety, to the practice of speaking of the strength of motives, or inclinations, or desires; for power is a “property of the person, or the soul; and not the property of a property.”



dispositions and desires of the soul, agents, or are they merely the properties of agents? Let the necessitarian answer this question, and then determine whether his logic is consistent with itself.

Mr. Locke, also, has well said, that it is absurd to inquire whether “the will be free or no; inasmuch as *liberty*, which is but a *power*, belongs only to agents, and cannot be an attribute or modification of will, which is also but a power.” Though Mr. Locke applied this remark to the





inconsistent, fluctuating and unsatisfactory.

The hypothesis that the desires impel the will to act, is inconsistent with observed facts. If this hypothesis were true, the phenomena of volition would be very different from what they are. A man may desire that it should rain, for example; he may have the most intense feeling on this subject imaginable, and there may be no counteracting desire or feeling whatever; now if desire ever impelled a man to volition, it would induce him, in such a case, to will



merely one of the conditions necessary to volition, and not its producing cause.

Again. It has been frequently observed, since the time of Butler, that our passive impressions often become weaker and weaker, while our active habits become stronger and stronger. Thus, the feeling of pity, by being frequently excited, may become less and less vivid, while the active habit of benevolence, by which it is supposed to be induced, becomes more and more energetic. That is to say,





apt to act but feebly; and that when they are intense, we are accustomed to act with energy. Or, in other words, that we do not *ordinarily* act with so much energy in order to gratify a slight feeling or emotion, as we do to gratify one of greater intensity and painfulness. But it is wrong to conclude from hence, that it is the increased intensity of feeling, which produces the increased energy of the action. No matter how intense the feeling, it is wrong to conclude, that it literally causes us to act, that it ever

lays the will under constraint, and thereby destroys, even for a moment, our free-agency. Such an assumption is a mere hypothesis, unsupported by observation, inconsistent with the dictates of reason, and irreconcilable with observed facts.

I repeat it, such an assumption is inconsistent with observed facts; for who that has any energy of will, has not, on many a trying occasion, stood firm amid the fiercest storm of passion; and, though the elements of discord raged













The sensibility does not *act*, it merely *suffers*. The appetites and passions, which have always been called the “active powers,” the “moving principles,” and so forth, should be called the passive susceptibilities. Unless this truth be clearly and fully recognized, and the commonly received notion respecting the relation which the appetites and passions sustain to the will, to the *active power*, be discarded, it seems to me, that the great doctrine of the liberty of the will, must continue to be involved in

the saddest perplexity, the most distressing darkness.

## **SECTION 9: OF THE LIBERTY OF INDIFFERENCE.**

IF, as I have endeavoured to show, the appetites and passions exert no positive influence in the production of volition, if they do not sustain the relation of cause to the acts of the will; then is the doctrine of the liberty of indifference placed in a clear and strong light. Having admitted that the sensitive part of our











strong for him, may blind his mind to a sense of his guilt, and lull his conscience into a fatal repose.

The necessitarian, like a skillful general, is not slow to attack this weak point in the philosophy of free-agency. If our emotions operate to produce volition, says he, then the strongest must prevail; to say otherwise, is to say that it is not the strongest. This is the ground uniformly occupied by President Day. And it is urged by President Edwards, that if a great degree of such



must, at times, suffer a total eclipse.

The liberty which we really possess, then, does not consist in an indifference of the desires and affections, but in that of the will itself. We are perfectly free, says the libertarian, in regard to all those things about which our feelings are in a state of indifference; such as touching one of two spots, or choosing one of two objects that are perfectly alike. To this the necessitarian replies, what does it signify that a man has a perfect liberty in

regard to the choice of “one of two peppercorns ?” Are not such things perfectly insignificant, and unworthy “the grave attention of the philosopher,” while treating of the great questions of moral good and evil ?

There is some truth in this reply, and some injustice. It truly signifies nothing, that we are at perfect liberty to choose between two pepper-corns, if we are not so to choose between good and evil, life and death. But in making this attack upon the position of his opponent,



the case of “two peppercorns,” it may be made to serve an important purpose in philosophy, how much soever it may be despised by the philosopher.

If we keep the distinction between the will and the sensibility in mind, it will throw much light on what has been written in regard to the subject of indifference. If you offer a guinea and a penny to a man's choice, asks President Day, which will he choose? Will the one exert as great an influence over him as the other? President Day may assert,



if he pleases, that the guinea will exert the greater influence over his feelings; but this does not destroy the equilibrium of the will. The feelings and the will are different. By the one we feel, by the other we act; by the one we *suffer*, by the other we *do*. Why, then, will the man be certain to choose the guinea, all other things being equal? Not because its influence acts upon the will, either directly or indirectly through the passions, and compels him to choose it, but because he has a purpose to



being made to do so by the action of anything upon *the will itself*, he imagines that we dethrone the Almighty, and “place chance upon the throne of the moral universe.” Day on the Will, p. 195. But I would remind him, once for all, that the act of a free designing cause, no less than that of a necessitated act, proceeding from an efficient cause, (if such a thing can be conceived,) is utterly inconsistent with the idea of accident. Choice in its very nature is opposed to chance.

The doctrine of the

indifference of the will has been subjected to another mode of attack. This doctrine implies that we have a power to choose one thing or another; or, as it is sometimes called, a power of choice to the contrary. For, if the will is not controlled by any extraneous influence, it is evident that we may choose a thing, or let it alone—that we may put forth a volition, or refuse to put it forth. This power, which results from the idea of indifference as just explained, is regarded as in the highest degree absurd;





choosing. This is the light in which the doctrine of indifference is frequently represented by Edwards, but it is a gross misrepresentation.

“The question is,” says Edwards, “whether ever the soul of man puts forth an act of will, while it yet remains in a state of liberty, viz: as implying a state of indifference ; or whether the soul ever exerts an act of preference, while at the very time *the will* is in a perfect equilibrium, not inclining one way more than another,” p. 72. If this be

the point in dispute, he may well add, that "the very putting of the question is sufficient to show the absurdity of the affirmative answer and he might have added, the utter futility of the negative reply. "How ridiculous," he continues, "for anybody to insist that the soul chooses one thing before another, when, at the very same instant, it is perfectly indifferent with respect to each! This is the same thing as to say, we shall prefer one thing to another, at the very same time that it has no preference. Choice and









them in their strongholds and fastnesses? By no means. There never was a more honest reasoner than Edwards. But his psychology is false; and hence, he has not only misrepresented the doctrine of his opponents, but also his own. He confounds the sensitive part of our nature with the will, expressly in his definitions, though he frequently distinguishes them in his arguments. This is the reason why he sometimes asserts, that the choice of the mind is always as the sense of the



upon the sensibility with the choice of the mind; and thus misrepresents both his own doctrine, and that of his opponents, by reducing the one to an insignificant truism, and the other to a glaring absurdity. President Day should have avoided the error of Edwards, in thus misconceiving the doctrine of his opponents; for he expressly distinguishes the sensibility from the will. But there is this difference between Edwards and Day; the first expressly confounds these two parts of our nature, and then



in the truism, that a thing is always as itself; there manfully contending against those who assert that a thing is different from itself.

The doctrine of the liberty of indifference, as usually held, is this—that the will is not determined by any prevailing influence. This is not a perfect liberty, it is true, wherever the will is partially influenced by an extraneous cause; but it is not equivalent to the gross absurdity of the position, that the will chooses without choosing. Nor can we possibly reduce it to this







## SECTION 10: OF ACTION AND PASSION.

THERE are no two things in nature which are more perfectly distinct than action and passion; the one necessarily excludes the other. Thus, if an effect is produced in anything, by the action or influence of something else, then is the thing in which the effect is produced wholly passive in regard to it. The effect itself is called passion or passiveness. It is not an act of that in which it is produced; it is an effect



opposite and contrary the one to the other; and hence, it is absurd to assert that the mind may be caused to act, or that a volition can be produced by anything acting upon the mind. This is a self-evident truth. The younger Edwards calls for proof of it; but the only evidence there is in the case, is that which arises from the nature of the things themselves, as they must appear to every mind which will bestow suitable reflection on the subject. But as he held the affirmative, maintaining

















meditate upon this subject, without perceiving that the law of *inertia* is a self-evident truth, necessarily arising out of the very nature of matter ?

It does not follow, then, that a truth is not self-evident, because it does not appear so to all men; for some may be blinded to the truth by an illusion of the senses. This is the case with the necessitarian. He has always seen the motion of body produced by the action of something else; and hence, confounding the activity of mind with the motion of body, he

concludes that volition is produced by the prior action of something else. All that he needs in order to see the impossibility of such a thing, is severe and sustained meditation. But how can we expect this from him ? Is he not a great reasoner, rather than a great thinker ? Does he not display his skill in drawing logical conclusions from the illusions of the senses, and assumptions founded thereon; rather than in laying his foundations and his premises aright, in the immutable depths of meditation and









passive in relation to its cause? This is not denied. Is it active then in relation to anything ? President Day says it is. But is this so? Is not an effect, which is wholly produced in one thing by the action or influence of another, wholly passive? Is not the thing which, according to the supposition, is wholly passive to the influence acting upon it, wholly passive? In other words, is it made to act? Does it not merely suffer? If it is endued with an active nature, and really puts forth an act, is not this act

clearly different from the passive impression made upon it?

One would certainly suppose so, but for the logic of the necessitarian. Let us examine this logic. "The term passive," says President Day, "is sometimes employed to express the relation of an effect to its cause. In this sense, it is so far from being inconsistent with activity, that activity may be the very effect which is produced. A thing may be *caused* to be active. A cannon shot is said to be passive, with respect to the



action of mind. “A thing may be caused to act,” says President Day. But how does he show this? By showing that a thing may be caused to move! “Is no *activity* given to the ball? Is not the whirlwind *active*, when it tears up the forest?” And so he goes on, leaving the light of reason and of consciousness; now rushing into the darkness of the whirlwind; now riding “on the mountain wave;” and now plunging into the depths of “volcanic lava;”—all the time in quest of light respecting the phenomena of mind! We





illustrations. Hence, it becomes necessary to bear this distinction always in mind, in the examination of their writings. It should be rendered perfectly clear to our minds by meditation; and never permitted to grow dim through forgetfulness. This is indispensably necessary to shut out the illusions of the senses, in order that we may have a clear and unclouded view of the phenomena of nature.

Is the motion of body, then, one and the same thing with the action of mind ? They are frequently



called by the same name. The motion of mind, and the action of body, are very common modes of expression. Body is said to act, when it only moves; and mind is said to move, when it really acts. These metaphors and supposed analogies are intimately and inseparably interwoven into the very frame-work of our language; and hence the necessity of guarding against them in our conceptions. They are almost as subtle as the great adversary of truth; and therefore we should be

constantly on the watch, lest we should be deceived or misled by them.

Let us look, then, at these things just as they are in themselves. When a body moves, it simply passes from one place to another; and when the mind acts or chooses, it simply prefers one thing to another. Here, there is no real identity or sameness of nature. The body *suffers* a change; the mind itself *acts*. The one is pure passion or passiveness; the other is pure action—the very opposite of passivity. The one is a *suffering*, and the





recourse to such an argument, only betrays the miserable weakness, and the forlorn hopelessness, of the cause in which it is enlisted.

Indeed, the learned president seems, after all, to be at least half conscious that the analogies of matter can throw no light on the phenomena of mind; and that what he has so eloquently said, amounts to just nothing at all. For he says, "It may be objected, that these are all examples of *inanimate* objects; and that they have no proper application to mental



has ever denied that a body may be caused to move; the only point on which we desire to be enlightened is, whether the mind may be caused to act. To this point President Day next directly comes. Leaving “inanimate objects,” he says, “take the case of deep and earnest thinking. Is there no activity in this ? And is it without a cause ? When reading the orations of Demosthenes, or the demonstrations of Newton, are our minds wholly inactive; or if they think intensely, have our thoughts no dependence on





read a book, unless he has it to read; and, consequently, his thoughts in reading the book are absolutely dependent on the possession of it. But still, the possession of a book is the *condition*, and not the *cause*, of his reading it. The cause of a thing, and the indispensable *condition* of it, are perfectly distinct from each other; and the argument of Day, in confounding them, has presented us with another sophism.

The ideas of a condition and of a cause, though so



particular class of thoughts cannot come to existence, except upon a particular condition! This is not to reason; but to slip and to slide from one meaning of an ambiguous word to another.

When it is said that the mind cannot be caused to act, President Day must have known in what sense the term cause is used in this proposition. He must have known, that no one meant to assert, that there are no *conditions* or *antecedents*, on which the action of the mind depends. There is not an

advocate of free-agency in the universe, who will contend, that the mind can choose a thing, unless there is a thing to be chosen; or, to take his own illustration, can read a book, unless there is a book to be read. The question is not, whether there are *conditions* without the existence of which the mind cannot act; this no one denies; but whether there is, or can be, a real and efficient cause of the mind's action. The point in dispute, relates not to mere fact of dependence, but to the *nature* of that





argument,” p. 159. The only cause in every case of motion, is that *force*, whatever it may be, which acts upon the body moved, and puts it in motion. All the rest is pure passion or passiveness. The motion of the body is not action; it is the most pure passion of which the mind can form a conception. If a body in motion is said to act upon another, this is but a metaphor ; there is no real action in the case. Indeed, if a body be put in motion, and meets with no resistance, it will move on in a right line forever—and

why? just because of its *inertia*, of its inherent destitution of a power to act. As a mathematician, President Day certainly knew all this; but he seems to have forgotten it all, in his eagerness to support the cause of moral necessity.

He saw that motion is frequently called action; he saw that one body is sometimes said to act upon another; and this was sufficient for his purpose. He did not reflect upon the natures of motion and of volition, as they are in themselves; he views them



through the medium of an ambiguous phraseology. Nor did he reflect, that if motion is communicated from one body to another, this is not because one body really acts upon another, but because it is impossible for two bodies to occupy the same place at one and the same time. He did not reflect, that if motion is communicated from one body to another, this does not arise from the activity, but from the impenetrability of matter. In short, he did not reflect, that there is no state or phenomena of matter,









their natures. “Action, when properly set in opposition to passion or passiveness,” says he, “is no real existence; it is not the same with *an action*, but is a mere relation.” And again, “Action and passion are not two contrary natures when placed in opposition they are only contrary relations. The same ground is taken by President Day. “Are not cause and effect,” says he, “opposite in their natures? They are opposite relations, but not always opposite things.” They contend, that an object













emotion may be produced, which is the same thing with an act of the will or a volition. It is upon this confusion of things, that his whole system rests; for if the sensibility is different from the will, as most persons, at the present day, will admit it is ; then to excite an emotion, or to make a passive impression upon the sensibility, is very different from producing a volition.

Edwards has taken great pains with the superstructure of his system, while he has left its foundations without



Such assertions, (and I have already had occasion to adduce many such,) clearly identify a sense of the most agreeable, or the most pleasing emotion, with an act of the will. His definition, as we have already seen, laid the foundation for this, and his arguments are based upon it. The passive impression, or the sensation produced, is, according to Edwards, a volition! No wonder, then, that he could conceive of an action of the mind *as being produced*. The wonder is, how he could conceive of it *as being an*

*action at all.*

Let us suppose, now, that a feeling or an emotion is produced by an object in view of the mind. It will follow, that the mind is passive in feeling, or in experiencing emotion. We are conscious of such feeling or emotion; and hence we infer, that we are susceptible of feeling or emotion. This susceptibility we call the sensibility, the heart, the affections, &c. But there is another phenomenon of our nature, which is perfectly distinct in nature and in kind from an emotion or a











Again; the same object may be both passive and active; passive with respect to one thing, and active with respect to another. Thus, says President Day, "The axe is passive, with respect to the hand which moves it; but active, with respect to the object which it strikes. The cricket club is passive in *receiving* motion from the hand of the player; it is active in *communicating* motion to the ball." The fallacy of all such illustrations, in confounding motion and action, I have already noticed, and I intend to say







confounding the *sensibility* with the *will*; and the light of this distinction is no sooner held up, than we see that a very important link is wanting in the chain of the necessitarian's logic. Let this light be carried around through all the dark corners of his system, and through all its dark labyrinths of words; and many a lurking sophism will be detected and brought out from its unsuspected hiding place.

When it is said, that the same thing may be active and passive, this remark should be understood with





proposition to the mind itself; and not to the will or to volition. It is the mind that acts; and hence the mind must be also passive; or we cannot say that *the same thing* may be both active and passive.

The mind then, it may be said, is both active and passive at the same time. But it is passive in regard to its emotions and feelings; and hence, if you please, these may be produced. It is active in regard to its volitions, or rather in its volitions; and hence these cannot be produced by the action of





## SECTION 11: OF THE ARGUMENT FROM THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

THE argument from the foreknowledge of God, is one on which the necessitarian relies with great confidence. Nor is this at all surprising; since to so many minds, even among distinguished philosophers, the prescience of Deity and the free-agency of man have appeared to be irreconcilable.

Thus, says Mr. Stewart, “I





man is free, though I see not the way of it.”

Sentiments like these, which are so often met with in the writings of eminent philosophers, have repeatedly led me to reconsider the conclusion at which I have arrived on this subject; but I have been able to discover no reason why it should be abandoned. Indeed, if authority were a sufficient reason why the great difficulty in question should be regarded as incapable of being solved, I should abandon it in despair, and leave the



necessitarian to make the most of his argument; but it has only induced me to proceed with the greater caution; and this, instead of having shaken my convictions, has settled them with the greater firmness and clearness in my mind. Whether I am in the right, or whether I labour under a hallucination, satisfactory only to myself, and perplexing to all others, I must submit to the candid consideration of the reader. Why should it be thought impossible to reconcile the free-agency of man with



things themselves. What shall we do then? Shall we set to work to reform our ideas? Shall we explain away the free-agency of man, or deny the foreknowledge of God? No. We may retain both.

Edwards contends, that volitions are brought to pass by the influence of motives, and that it is impossible in any case, that a volition should depart from the influence of the strongest motive. This is the great doctrine of moral necessity, which it is the object of President Edwards to establish. Now,

if his celebrated argument, or “demonstration,” as it is called, proves this point, then it is to be held as true and valid; but if it only proves some other thing which is called by the name of necessity, it is not to the purpose. And if it can be shown, that his argument does not prove anything at all in relation to the causation of choice, it will appear that it has no relevancy to the point at issue.

The foreknowledge of God, I admit, infers the necessity of all human actions, in one sense of the



obscured by an imperfect and ambiguous phraseology, rather than by the inherent difficulties of the subject. This is the position which I shall endeavour to establish.

The first argument of President Edwards is as follows. When the existence of a thing is infallibly and indissolubly connected with something else, which has already had existence, then its existence is necessary; but the future volitions of moral agents, are infallibly and indissolubly connected with the foreknowledge of

God; and therefore they are necessary, p. 114-15. Now this argument is perfectly sound; the conclusion is really contained in the premise, or definition of necessity, and it is fairly deduced from it. It is as perfect as any syllogism in Euclid- *but what does it prove ?* It proves that all human actions are necessary—but in what sense ? Does it prove that they are necessary with a *moral necessity* ? Does it prove that they are brought to pass by the influence of moral causes? No such thing is even pretended. “I

allow what Dr. Whitby says to be true,” says Edwards, “that mere foreknowledge does not affect the thing known, to *make* it more certain or future,” p. 122. He admits that foreknowledge exerts “no influence on the thing known to make it necessary.” He does not even pretend that there is any *moral necessity* shown to exist by this argument; and hence his conclusion has no connexion with the great doctrine of the Inquiry, or the point in dispute. It aims at the word, but not at the thing.



The infallible connexion it shows to exist, is admitted to be entirely different from the infallible connexion between moral causes and volitions; that is to say, it is admitted that it does not prove anything to the purpose.

But is the indissoluble connexion, or necessity, established by this argument, at all inconsistent with human liberty? If it is not, and if our scheme of liberty is perfectly consistent and reconcilable with it; then it infers nothing, and is nothing, that is opposed to

what we hold.

This question admits of an easy solution. The foreknowledge of a future event proves it to be necessary in precisely the same manner that the knowledge of a present event shows it to be necessary. This is conceded by Edwards. "All certain knowledge," says he, "whether it be foreknowledge, or after knowledge, or concomitant knowledge, proves the thing known now to be necessary, by some means or other; *or proves that it is impossible it should now*





about to bring forth;" and that an event comes into being without any cause of its existence. This event then exists; it is seen, and it is known to exist. Now, even on this wild supposition, there is an infallible and indissoluble connexion between the existence of the event and the knowledge of it; and hence it is necessary, in the sense above explained. But what has this necessary connexion to do with the cause of its existence ? This indissoluble connexion, this dire necessity, is perfectly consistent, as we



respect to the future volitions of human beings. This position is not denied by Edwards; he considers, in fact, that it strengthens, rather than weakens, his argument. “Because it shows the existence of the event to be so settled and firm, that *it is as if it had already been*; inasmuch as *in effect* it actually exists already and much more to the same purpose, p. 122-3. “It is as strong arguing,” says he, “from the effect to the cause, as from the cause to the effect.”

This is all true; it is as strong arguing from effect

to cause, as it is from cause to effect. But do the arguments prove the same thing? Let us see. I know a thing to exist; and therefore it does exist. This is to reason from effect to cause. The conclusion is inevitable ; but what does it prove ? Why, it proves that the thing does exist—it proves the bare fact of existence. The indissoluble connexion, or the necessity, in this case, exists between the knowledge and the event known; and it has no relation to the question how the event came to



exist. This argument, then, in regard to human volitions, only proves that they are indissolubly connected with their effects, and are necessarily implied by them; just as every cause is implied by its effects: but no libertarian in the world has ever questioned such a position. For all that such an argument proves, all the volitions of moral agents may come into existence, without having the least shadow of reason or ground of their existence. We admit that volitions are efficient causes ; and that

they have effects, with which they are indissolubly connected. Edwards undertook to show, that volitions are necessary, because they are infallibly and indissolubly connected with their causes; and he has shown that they are necessary, because they are infallibly and indissolubly connected with their effects! This is one branch of his great argument.

There is another sense, in which the knowledge of an event, whether it *before*, or *after*, or *concomitant*, knowledge, proves it to be necessary. This sense is not

clearly distinguished from the former by Edwards. He recognizes them both, however, although he blends them together, and frequently turns from the one to the other in the course of his argument. It is highly important, and affords no little satisfaction, to keep them clearly distinct in our minds.

A thing is said to be necessary, as we have seen, because it is connected with the knowledge of it; and, if a thing does exist, or is certainly and infallibly known to exist, it may be



necessity, because it is indissolubly connected with the knowledge of it. The former kind of necessity is frequently presented in this form of expression, that if a thing does exist, it is impossible it should be otherwise than true that it does exist. In this form of expression, it is frequently resorted to by Edwards.

Thus, says he, "I observed before, in explaining the nature of necessity, that in things which are past, their past existence is now *necessary*; having already made sure of existence, *it is*





unless it did exist. And, as it does exist, “it is impossible that it should be otherwise than true that it does exist or, in other words, it is impossible for it not to exist now, while it does exist. This is all there is in this part of the argument.

And what does it amount to? It is a simple declaration of what nobody ever denied—that if a thing exists, or is to exist, or has existed, it is impossible to conceive of it as not existing at the time of its existence. All this is perfectly true, without the







a *causal* necessity, are most strangely confounded in the argument of President Edwards.

Will it be said, that in this argument, it was not the object of Edwards, to prove that there is a moral necessity in regard to our volitions; but only that they are “not without all necessity?” Suppose this to be the case, with whom has he any controversy, or to what purpose has he argued? No one has ever held that human volitions are “without all necessity,” according to Edwards’ use of that term; and no one







contradiction, and “to suppose God’s foreknowledge to be inconsistent with itself,” p. 117. Is it not strange, that it did not occur to Edwards, that if to deny his position is to deny that God foreknows what he foreknows; then to affirm it, is only to affirm that he foreknows what he foreknows? Indeed, all those reasonings in which he represents the denial of his position as self-contradictory and absurd, should have convinced him that he could prove nothing to the purpose, by arguing













fact. On the other hand, if the scheme of necessity be a mere hypothesis, having no corresponding reality in the universe ; then God never foreknew that it is according to such scheme that all human actions are brought to pass; unless he foreknew things to be necessitated which in reality are not necessitated. Hence, we can prove nothing by reasoning from the foreknowledge of God; except what we first assume to be true, and consequently foreknown to Him; and, if we choose to resort to this pitiful way of

begging the question, we may prove our hypothesis just as well as any other.

The foreknowledge of an event, as I have already said, proves nothing more nor less than *the bare certainty* of its future existence; it decides nothing as *to the manner* of its coming into existence. The

necessitarian may ring the changes upon this subject as long as he pleases, and all he can possibly make out of it is, that if God foreknows a thing, it will certainly be, and to suppose otherwise, is a















idea of necessity, while they attack and defend themselves upon another idea thereof.

This is our present starting point then, agreed upon by all sides, that the foreknowledge of God infers the certainty of all future realities. Now, how can we conclude from hence, that the volitions of moral agents are, not only certain, but rendered certain by the influence of moral causes ? It may be said, that it is sufficient that the foreknowledge of God proves that human volitions will certainly



every effect must have a cause, in order to make out the doctrine of moral necessity, or the point in dispute! It would show, that after all the parade made with the divine prescience, it leaves the whole argument to rest upon ground which has already been occupied by one side, and fully considered by the other! It would only show, that a great pretense of demonstration had been made from the foreknowledge of God; whereas, in fact, it proves nothing to the purpose,





they cannot be certain, unless God have determined to bring them to pass.”

The same position is assumed by President Edwards, “There must be a certainty in things themselves,” says he, “before they are certainly foreknown.” ... “There must be a certainty in things to be a ground of certainty of knowledge, and render things capable of being known to be certain.” p. 122. Now, what is this certainty in things themselves, or in human volitions, without which





so evidently his meaning; and if it is not, then it is nothing to the purpose.

If Edwards means that a thing cannot be foreknown unless it has a sufficient ground and reason for its existence, and does not of itself come forth out of nothing, we are not at all concerned to deny his position. Every advocate of free-agency contends, that volition proceeds from the mind, acting in view of motives; and therefore is not destitute of a sufficient ground and reason of its existence. He denies that volition is necessarily











foresee future events, unless he “have determined to bring them to pass,” or unless they are brought to pass by a chain of producing causes, ultimately connected with his own will; and he will prove something to the purpose. But let him not talk so boastfully about demonstrations, while there is this exceedingly weak link in the chain of his argument. If God were so like one of ourselves, that he could not foresee future volitions, unless they are brought to pass by the operation of known

causes; then, I admit, that his foreknowledge would infer the moral necessity for which Edwards contends, provided he really possesses that knowledge; but if he were so imperfect a being, I should be compelled to believe, that there are some things which he could not foreknow.

This assumption comes with a peculiarly ill grace from the necessitarian. He should be the last man to contend, that God cannot foresee future events unless they are involved in known producing causes;







foreknown them from all eternity. The bare naked fact, that they are future infers all that is implied in God's foreknowledge of them; and it is just as much a contradiction in terms, to say that what is future will not come to pass, as it is to say, that what God foreknows will never take place. Hence, by bringing in the prescience of Deity, we do not really strengthen or add to the conclusion in favour of necessity. It only furnishes a very convenient and plausible method of begging the question, or of seeming to prove

something by hiding our sophisms in the blaze of the divine attributes. It only serves as a veil, behind which is concealed those sophistical tricks, by which both the performer and the spectator are deceived. This whole argument from the foreknowledge of God, is, indeed, a grand specimen of undesigned metaphysical jugglery, by which the mind is called off in one direction, whilst it is deceived, perplexed, and confounded, by not seeing what takes place in another.

It appears from these









not rain, should be true.” This sophism confounds the *axiomatical necessity* referred to in the premise, that it must rain or not rain, with the *causal necessity* intended to be deduced from it in the conclusion. This poor sophism has been adopted by Mr. Locke, and seriously employed to prove that human volitions “cannot be free.” Thus, says he, “It is unavoidably necessary to prefer the doing or forbearance of an action in a man’s power, which is once proposed to a man’s thoughts. The act of

volition or preferring one of the two, being that, which he cannot avoid, a man in respect of that act of willing is under necessity." Here we have precisely the same confusion of an *axiomatical* with a *causal* necessity, that occurs in the argument of Mr. Hobbes. And yet, the younger Edwards has deemed this argument of Mr. Locke as worthy of his special notice and commendation; and President Day falls in with the same idea, alleging that "we will because we cannot avoid willing," because we



come across it in the atheism of Hobbes ! But, unfortunately, he came across it in a different direction ; and hence, he has rescued it from the loathsome dunghill of atheistical trash, invested it with dignity, seeming to clothe it in the solemn sanction of religion, by covering it up in the ample folds of the divine Omniscience.

This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter. The prescience of God does not *make* our volitions necessary; it only *proves* them to be certain.







former position, he really discards the argument from foreknowledge, and returns for support to the old argument, that every effect must have a cause. And if he assumes the latter, maintaining that God cannot foreknow future events unless he reasons from producing causes to effects, he builds his argument, not upon foreknowledge alone, but upon this in connection with a most unwarrantable flight of presumption, without which the argument from prescience is good for nothing.





manner, and not otherwise. Thus, I reason from what I know to what I do not know, from my knowledge of the actual world as it is, up to God's foreknowledge respecting it.

The necessitarian pursues the opposite course. He reasons from what he does not know, that is, from the particulars of the divine foreknowledge, about which he absolutely knows nothing *a priori*, down to the facts of the actual world. Thus, quitting the light which shines so brightly within us and around us, he seeks for





most wonderful phenomena in the history of the human mind, that, in reasoning about facts in relation to which the most direct and palpable sources of evidence are open before us, so many of its brightest ornaments should so long have endeavoured to draw conclusions from “the dark unknown” of God’s foreknowledge ; without perceiving that this is to reject the true method, to invert the true order of inquiry, and to involve the inquirer in all the darkness and confusion inseparable therefrom: without

perceiving that no powers, however great, that no genius, however exalted, can possibly extort from such a method anything but the dark, and confused, and perplexing exhibitions of an ingenious logomachy.

## **SECTION 12: OF EDWARDS' USE OF THE TERM NECESSITY.**

IN the controversy concerning the will, nothing is of more importance, it will readily be admitted, than to guard against the influence of the



ambiguity of words. Yet, it may be shown, that President Edwards has used the principal terms in this controversy in an exceedingly loose and indeterminate manner. This he has done especially in regard to the term *necessity*. His very definition prepares the way for such an abuse of language.

“*Philosophical necessity*,” says he, “is really nothing else than the FULL and fixed connexion between the THINGS SIGNIFIED BY THE SUBJECT AND PREDICATE OF A







necessary, that all right lines drawn from the centre to the circumference should be equal. It is necessary, fit, and suitable, that men should do to others, as they would that they should do to them. So innumerable metaphysical and mathematical truths are necessary *in themselves*; the subject and predicate of the proposition which affirms them, are perfectly connected of *themselves*.”

“2. The connexion of the subject and predicate of a proposition, which affirms the existence of something,



whatever is already come to pass, is now become necessary; it is become impossible it should be otherwise than true, that such a thing has been.”

“3. The subject and predicate of a proposition which affirms something to be, may have a real and certain connexion *consequentially*; and so the existence of the thing may be *consequentially* necessary, as it may be surely and firmly connected with something else, that is necessary in one of the former respects. As it is either fully and

thoroughly connected with that which is absolutely necessary in its own nature; or with something which has already made sure of its existence. This necessity lies *in*, and may be explained *by*, the connexion between two or more propositions, one with another. Things which are *perfectly connected* with other things that are necessary, are necessary themselves, by a necessity of consequence.”

After having defined what he means by philosophical or metaphysical necessity, he tells us, that this is the



sense in which he uses the word, when he endeavours to show that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty. And yet under “this sense,” how many totally distinct ideas are embraced! The eternal existence of being in general; the attributes of God; the proposition that two and two are four; the equality of the radii of a circle; the moral duty that we should do as we would be done by; the existence of a thing which has already come to pass; the existence of things, that are connected with that which

is absolutely necessary in itself, or with something that has already made sure of its existence; the connexion of two or more propositions with each other—all these things are included in his definition of philosophical necessity! And yet he tells us, that he uses the term in this sense (in what sense ?) when he undertakes to reconcile liberty with necessity! When he says, that he employs the word in *this* sense, one would suppose that, as a great metaphysician, he referred to some one of its precise





philosophical necessity, with the free-agency of man. He contends that there is a necessary connexion between the influence of motives and volitions. This he calls moral necessity. It differs from natural necessity, says he, it differs from the necessary connexion between cause and effect; but yet, he expressly tells us, that this difference "does not lie so much *in the nature of the connexion*, as in the *terms connected*." In both cases, he maintains, the connexion is necessary and absolute. The two



moral necessity, as it is defined and explained in the Inquiry, is consistent with the free-agency of man.

There is one sense of the term in question, says he, “which especially belongs to the controversy about acts of the will,” p. 30. It is what he calls “a necessity of consequence.” This would be very true, if he merely meant by a necessity of consequence, to refer to the necessary connexion between cause and effect. But this is not his meaning; for he expressly says, that “a necessity of







if they were identically the same. Such a confounding of different ideas, has led to no little confusion and error in the reasoning of President Edwards.

The subject of the last section furnishes a striking illustration of the justness of this remark. From the proposition that a volition is certainly and infallibly foreknown, it follows, by a necessity of consequence, that it will come to pass. This is an instance of the necessary connexion between two ideas or propositions ; between the idea or proposition, that a











when he infers the necessity of human actions from the foreknowledge of God. He confounds the necessary connexion between two propositions, with the necessary connexion between cause and effect. This single ambiguity has been a mighty instrument in the building up of that portentous scheme of necessity, which has seemed to overshadow the glory and beauty of man's nature as a free and accountable being.

This is not the only ambiguity of the term in









argument is not sound. It proceeds on the supposition, that unless a volition is produced, it cannot be prevented, by a preceding act of volition. This is a false supposition. I choose, for example, to go out at one of the doors of my room. This choice is not produced by any preceding act of choice. And yet I can certainly prevent it, by choosing to go out at the other door of the room, or by choosing to sit still. Thus one act of choice may, from the very nature of things, necessarily exclude or prevent another act of

choice; although it could not possibly have produced that other act of choice.

But suppose the argument to be sound, what does it prove? It proves our actions to be necessary; but in what sense? Does it show them to be subject to that moral necessity, for which Edwards contends, and against which we protest? This is the question, let me repeat, which we have undertaken to discuss; and if we would not wander in an eternal maze of words, we must keep to it; it is the talisman which is to

conduct us out of all our difficulties and perplexities. It is the first point, and the second point, and the third point in logic, to keep to the issue, steadily, constantly, and without the least shadow of turning. Otherwise we shall lose ourselves in a labyrinth of words, in darkness and confusion interminable.

In what sense, then, does the above argument, supposing it to be sound, prove our actions to be necessary ? Does it prove them to be necessary with a moral necessity ? It does









previous acts of the will or choice in the case, which might prevent it." That is to say, it is necessary as to preceding acts of choice ; because, by the supposition, it is wholly independent of preceding acts of choice for its existence.

Now, in so far as the doctrine of moral necessity is concerned, this argument amounts to just exactly nothing. For although a volition may be necessary as to one particular cause, in consequence of its being wholly independent of that





necessitarian to endeavour to establish any other kind of necessity beside this.. Let him come directly to the point, and *keep to it*, if he would hope to accomplish anything. This shifting backwards and forwards from one meaning of an ambiguous term to another; this showing a volition to be necessary in one sense, and then tacitly assuming it to be necessary in another sense; is not the way to silence and refute the adversaries of the doctrine of moral necessity. It may show, (supposing the





supposition that it proceeds from the operation of *a cause*. These ideas are perfectly distinct. The difference between them is as clear as noon-day. It is true, they have the same name ; but to reason from the one to the other, is about as wild an abuse of language as could be made. President Edwards is required to show that a volition is necessary, in the sense of *its having a moral cause* ; he has shown that it is necessary in the sense of *its not having a cause*. This is his argument.

Let us view this subject in







necessity. On the very supposition we have made, diametrically opposite as it is to the former, we are still convicted of the same doctrine of necessity. We cannot escape from it. It pursues us, like a ghost, through the dark and ill-defined shadows of an ambiguous phraseology, and lays its cold hand upon us. Turn wheresoever we may, it is sure to meet us in some shape or other.

This is not all. We are also convicted of a contradiction in terms. It is shown, that we hold an act to be “both necessary and





and, in another sense of it, we deny it to be necessary. Is there anything very contradictory in all this? Anything to shock the common sense and reason of mankind ?

It may be said, that Edwards does not always endeavour to establish the doctrine of moral necessity; that he frequently aims merely to show, that our actions are “not without all necessity.” This is unquestionably true. He frequently arrives at this conclusion; and he seems to think that he has done something, whenever















illustrated by Mr. Stewart in his Essay on the Beautiful.

The various theories, which ingenious men have framed in relation to the beautiful, says Mr. Stewart, “have originated in a prejudice, which has descended to modern times from the scholastic ages ; that when a word admits of a variety of significations, these different significations must all be *species* of the same *genus* ; and must consequently include some essential idea common to every individual to which the

generic term can be applied.”

The question of Aristippas, “how can beauty differ from beauty,” says Mr. Stewart, “plainly proceeded on a total misconception of the nature of the circumstances; which, in the history of language, attach different meanings to the same word ; and which by slow and insensible gradations, remove them to such a distance from their primitive or radical sense, that no ingenuity can trace the successive steps of their































choice or not; for, on either of these opposite suppositions, he can show that our volitions are necessary. The absence of the very circumstance which makes it necessary in the one case, is that which makes it necessary in the other. Is choice produced by choice ? Then this dependence of choice upon choice, shows it to be necessary. Is choice *not* produced by choice ? Then this independence of choice upon choice is the very thing which shows it to be necessary! Thus this great champion of





## SECTION 13: OF NATURAL AND MORAL NECESSITY.

I HAVE already said many things bearing upon the famous distinction between natural and moral necessity; but this distinction is regarded as so important by its advocates, that it deserves a separate notice. This I shall proceed to give it.

The distinction in question is treated with no great reverence by the advocates of free-agency. It is denounced by them as a distinction without a

difference; and, though this may be true in the main, yet this is not the way to settle anything. There is, indeed, a real difference between natural and moral necessity, as they are held and described by necessitarians; and if we pay no attention to it, our declarations about its futility will be apt to produce more heat than light. I fully recognize the justness of the demand made by Dr. Edwards, that those who insist that natural and moral necessity are the same, should tell us in what





and a volition. In this respect, I believe that there is a greater difference between them than does the necessitarian himself; for he considers volition to be of the same nature with an effect, whereas I regard it as essentially different in nature and in kind from an effect.

There is another difference between natural and moral necessity. Natural necessity admits of an opposition of the will; whereas it is absurd to suppose any such opposition in the case of moral necessity. A man



necessity, as they are viewed by the necessitarian. Whether they are not inconsistent with their ideas of moral necessity, is another question. But as I am not concerned with that question at present, I am willing to take these differences without the least abatement. Admitting, then, that these distinctions are well-founded, and that they are perfectly consistent with the idea of moral necessity, let us see in what respects there is an agreement between the things under





of its cause. The nature of the connexion is the same in both; and in both it is equally absolute.

Now we have seen the differences, and we have also seen the points of agreement; and the question is, not whether this famous distinction be well-founded, but whether it will serve the purpose for which it is employed. In the full light, and in the perfect recognition of this distinction, we deny that it will serve the purpose of the necessitarian.

It is supposed, that natural necessity alone

interferes with the free-agency of man, while moral necessity is perfectly consistent with it. But, in reality, moral necessity is more utterly subversive of all free-agency and accountability than natural necessity itself. Think not that this is a mere hasty and idle assertion. Let us look at it, and see if it is not true.

We have already seen, that a caused volition is no volition at all;—that a necessary agent is a contradiction in terms. In other words, a power to act must itself act, and not be















that this is to suppose that it is the effect of motive, and at the same time that it is not the effect of motive!

“All agree,” says Day, “that a necessity which is opposed to our choice, is inconsistent with liberty,” p. 91. That is to say, a necessity which cuts off or prevents the external consequence of our choice, is inconsistent with liberty of the will; but that which takes away one choice, and sets up another, is perfectly consistent with it! If the arm is held, so that the free choice cannot move it, then is the liberty of the will

interfered with; but, though the will may be absolutely swayed and controlled, by the influence of motives, or by the sovereign power of God himself, yet is it perfectly free! If such be the liberty of the will, what is it worth?

There are many things, which it is beyond the power of the human mind to accomplish. Even in such cases, the natural necessity under which we are said to labour, does not interfere with the liberty of the will. If we cannot do such things, it is not







talk about natural necessity. But as the question, in the present controversy, is, whether a man is accountable for his internal acts, for the volitions of his mind? to talk about natural necessity is wholly irrelevant. It has nothing to do with such a controversy; and hence, Edwards is entirely mistaken when he supposes that it is natural necessity, and that alone, which is opposed to the freedom of the will. It is in fact opposed to nothing but the freedom of the body; and by lugging it into the













therefore, does not blindly aim merely at the name, while it misses the thing; it does indeed bear with all its force directly upon the scheme of moral necessity itself. And its power is sought to be evaded, as we have seen, and as we shall still further see, not by explaining the ambiguities of language, so as to enlighten mankind, but by confounding the most opposite natures, such as action and passion, volition and local motion, through the ambiguities of language. It is the necessitarian, who is







metaphysical acumen, of its advocates and admirers.

## **SECTION 14: OF EDWARDS' IDEA OF LIBERTY.**

IT was not the design of Edwards, as it is well known, to interfere with the moral agency of man. He honestly believed that the scheme of necessity, as held by himself, was perfectly consistent with the doctrine of liberty; and he retorted upon his adversaries that it was their system, and not his, which

struck at the foundation of moral agency and accountability. But however upright may have been his intentions, he has merely left us the name of liberty, while he has in reality denied to us its nature and its essence.

According to his view of the subject, “The plain and obvious meaning of the words freedom and liberty, in common speech, is the *power, opportunity, or advantage that any one has to do as he pleases*. Or, in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of

doing, or conducting in any respect as he wills. And the contrary to liberty, whatever name we call that by, is a person's being hindered, or unable to conduct as he will, or being necessitated to do otherwise."

This is the kind of liberty for which he contends. And he says, "There are two things contrary to what is called liberty in common speech. One is *constraint*, otherwise called *force*, *compulsion*, and *co-action*, which is a person's being necessitated to do a thing *contrary* to his will. The





do a thing, he cannot be restrained from doing it according to his will. This kind of liberty, then, as it presupposes the existence of a determination of the will, has nothing to do with the manner in which that determination is brought to pass. If the determination of the mind or will were brought to pass, so to speak, by an absolutely irresistible force ; just as any other effect is brought to pass by its efficient cause; yet this kind of liberty might exist in its utmost perfection. For it only requires that after the

will is determined in this manner, or in any other, that it should be left free from *constraint* or *restraint*, to flow on just as it has been determined to do. It is no other liberty than that which is possessed by a current of water, when it is said to flow *freely*, because it is not opposed in its course by any material obstruction.

That the liberty for which Edwards contends, has nothing to do with the manner in which our actions or volitions come to pass; or, more properly









Liberty, according to Edwards' sense of the term, has nothing to do with the controversy respecting free-agency and necessity. It is as consistent with fatalism as could be desired by the most extravagant supporters of that odious system. Hence, when the doctrine of necessity is denied, and that of liberty or moral agency is asserted, something more than this is intended. The idea of liberty, as it stands connected with the controversy in question, has reference to the manner in which our













of that volition was cut off and prevented by an overruling necessity, which had no conceivable relation to the manner in which he came by his volition. Wherever there is a volition, there is this kind of liberty; for a volition is not, and cannot be, produced by any coercive force.

The foregoing illustration might have been very consistently offered by President Edwards, who considered a volition and a preference of the mind as identically the same; but it comes not with so good a



not show, and I humbly conceive it cannot be shown, that there can be a volition anywhere in the universe where there is not freedom. The very idea of a volition, or an act of the mind, necessarily implies that kind of philosophical liberty for which we contend.

The above notion of liberty, which Mr. Locke borrowed from Hobbes, and Edwards from Locke, evidently confounds the motion of the body, (which they frequently call action,) with volition or action of the mind. Thus, no matter

how a volition comes to pass, or is caused to exist, if there is nothing to prevent the *motion* of the body from following its influence, we are said to be perfectly free. This kind of liberty, therefore, refers to the motion of the body, and not to the action of the mind. It has no reference whatever to the question, Is the mind free in the act of willing? This is the question in dispute ; and hence, if the necessitarian would say any thing to the purpose, he must show that his scheme is reconcilable with the freedom of the



mind in willing. This Edwards has not attempted to do. He has, in fact, as we have seen, only given us the name, while he has taken from us the substance of liberty.

The idea of liberty, for which Edwards contends, may be illustrated by an unobstructed fall of water. Indeed, this is the very thing by which Mr. Hobbes has chosen to illustrate and explain it. "I conceive liberty to be rightly defined in this manner," says he; "liberty is the absence of all the impediments to action, (motion?) that are not





















have frequently seen, and as we here see, our pleasing and our choosing are one and the same thing. Hence, to move our bodies according to our pleasure, is to move it according to our choice; and to choose as we please, is to choose as we choose. President Day need not have gone to the letter in question, in order to find this doctrine; for it is repeatedly set forth in the Inquiry. President Edwards, as we have seen, frequently contends in the Inquiry, that we always choose as we choose; and as frequently makes his















## SECTION 15: OF EDWARDS' IDEA OF VIRTUE.

IN order to reconcile his scheme of necessity with the existence and reality of virtue, it appears that Edwards has adopted a false notion of virtue. This is the course he has taken, as I have already shown, in regard to the doctrine of liberty or free-agency, in order to reconcile it with necessity; and if I mistake not, it may be shown, that he has been able to reconcile necessity and

















vicious, on account of what he has wholly and exclusively received from another, appears to me to be utterly irreconcilable with one of the clearest and most unequivocal dictates of reason and conscience.

According to the above passage, there can be no medium between virtuous and vicious dispositions. This sentiment is still more explicitly declared in the following words; “In a moral agent, subject to moral obligations, it is the same thing to be perfectly *innocent*, as to be perfectly *righteous*. It must be the



original innocence, and becomes a transgressor. But before he has any opportunity of acting, at the instant of his creation, I humbly conceive that no moral agent is either to be praised or blamed for any disposition with which he may have been endowed by his Maker. He is neither virtuous nor vicious, neither righteous nor sinful. This was the condition of Adam, as it very clearly appears to me, at the instant of his creation. He was in a state of perfect *innocency* ; having neither



blamed, that he may be esteemed virtuous or vicious, on account of what he has wholly and exclusively received from another, appears to me to contradict one of the clearest and most unequivocal dictates of reason, one of the most universal and irreversible laws of human belief.

Though the Almighty endowed Adam with all that is lovely in human nature, the recipient of such noble qualities certainly deserved no credit for them, as he had no agency in their production.

All the praise and glory belonged to God. Such dispositions are no doubt the objects of our admiration and love, but they are no more the objects of our *moral approbation* than is the beauty of a flower. Both are the work of the same creative energy which hath diffused so much of loveliness and beauty over every part of the creation.

Hence, I deny that Adam was “created or brought into existence righteous.” I am willing to admit, that he “was brought into existence capable of acting





not derived them directly from his Creator, then the existence of virtue would have been impossible.

On this subject, his argument is ingenious and plausible. It is as follows: “It is agreeable to the sense of men, in all nations and ages, not only that the fruit or effect of a good choice is virtuous, but that the good choice itself from whence that effect proceeds, is so; yea, also the antecedent good disposition, temper, or affection of mind, from whence proceeds that *good* choice, is virtuous. This is the general notion—not









inclination or principle. But yet no one, I presume, will contend that either the desire of food or the desire of knowledge, from which it is supposed to have proceeded, is in itself sinful. They were implanted in our nature by the finger of God, for wise and beneficent purposes; and to assert that they are sinful, is to make God the author of sin. Our first parents were not to blame because they were endowed with these principles. Hence, when it is said, that a sinful action must proceed from a sinful











which the act is done; and of which the created agent is himself the author.

There is one thing well worthy of remark in this connexion.

President Edwards contends, as we have seen, that Adam must have been created with a principle of virtue, of which his Maker was the sole author, or else the existence of virtue would have been impossible, And yet, he contends that Adam was created perfectly free from sin; —that as he came from the hand of his Maker, he was perfectly pure and holy, without the

least stain or blemish of any wrong or vicious principle upon his nature. Is it not wonderful, that it did not occur to so acute a reasoner as the author of the "Inquiry," that if his own argument was sound, it would, according to his own principle, prove the introduction of sin into the world to be utterly impossible? That he did not see, if it is impossible to account for the existence of holiness, except on the supposition that man was created or brought into the world with a principle of holiness implanted in his

















## SECTION 16: OF THE SELF-DETERMINING POWER.

THE advocates of free-agency have contended that the will is determined by itself, and not by the strongest motive. This is the ground which, so far as I know, has always been taken against the doctrine of necessity; but it may be questioned whether it is tenable, and whether the friends of moral agency might not have made far greater headway against their adversaries if they had not assumed such a

position. It appears to be involved in several inevitable contradictions; in the exposure of which the necessitarian has been accustomed to triumph.

The leading argument of Edwards against the self-determining power may be substantially stated in a few words. The will can be the cause of no effect, says he, except by acting or putting forth a volition to cause it; and hence, if we assert that the will causes its own volitions, we must suppose it causes them by preceding volitions. It can cause a volition only by a



the argument of Edwards, that it is based on a false assumption. The position of Edwards, "that if the will determines itself, it must determine itself by an act of choice," is, it has been contended, clearly an assumption unsupported, and incapable of being supported. The reason assigned for this objection is, that we do not know how any cause exerts itself in the production of phenomena; and consequently we have no right to assume that the will can cause its volitions only by volitions. In other

words, as we do not know how any cause produces its effects, so it is wholly a gratuitous assumption to say, that if the will causes its volitions, it must cause them in this particular manner, that is, by preceding acts of volition.

This objection does not seem to be well taken. When we say, that the will is the cause of any thing, we do not really mean that the will itself is the cause of it; for the will itself does not act: it is not an agent, it is merely the power of an agent. It is that power by which the mind acts.









question ? It is neither the mind, nor the will; for these might both exist, and yet no such effect result from them. A mind, or a will, that lies still and does not act, is the cause of no effect. If we would speak with philosophical precision, then, we should say that the *act* of the mind is the cause of the effect in question. The idea of a cause, in the strict and proper sense of the term, is that from which the effect immediately and necessarily flows. Now the motion of the hand is not necessarily connected with

the mind itself; for if the mind were to lie still and not act, no such effect would follow. It is with the act of the mind that the effect in question is connected as with its efficient cause. It is the act of the mind which implies the motion of the hand, and that is implied by it; and hence, it is the act of the mind, or the volition, that is properly said to be the cause of such motion. For cause and effect are said to imply each other.

Now Edwards has not pretended to say how a volition acts upon the





produces a change in the external part of our being; but yet do we not certainly know, that a dormant will can do nothing, and that it must act in order to produce an effect. If this be to explain how a cause acts, I humbly conceive that we may do so with perfect propriety.

Indeed, all that is assumed by Edwards, has been conceded to him by most of his adversaries. Thus says Dr. West, as quoted by Edwards the younger, "No being can become a cause, i. e. an efficient, or that which



produces an effect, but by first operating, acting, or energizing.” Here we are told, not how a cause acts, but how the mind becomes a cause, or the author of effects. This is all that Edwards takes for granted; and, for aught that I can see, he has done so with perfect propriety.

The same thing is conceded by Dr. Reid. “The change,” says he, “whether it be of thought, of will, or of motion, is the effect. Active power, therefore, is a quality in the cause, which enables it to produce the effect. And the exertion

of that active power in producing the effect, is called action, agency, efficiency. In order to the production of any effect, there must be in the cause, not only power, *but the exertion of that power*”—Essays on the Active Powers, p. 259. Here it is declared by Dr. Reid, that active power or the will must act, in order to produce an effect, whether the effect be in the mind itself, or out of the mind, whether it be “of thought, of will, or of motion.” This is all that Edwards assumes as the basis of his







































## SECTION 17: OF THE DEFINITION OF A FREE AGENT.

HAVING shown, as I trust, that there is no influence whatever operating upon the mind to produce volition, I am now prepared to declare the true idea of a free-agent.

A free-agent, then, is one who acts without being caused to act. Here the question arises, Is such a thing possible ? Can any being act, without being caused to act? The answer to this question, depends







forth volitions. The mind, then, and the power of the mind called will, constitute the ground of action or volition.

But a power to act, it will be said, is not a sufficient reason to account for the existence of action. This is true. The *reason* is to come. The sufficient reason, however, is not an efficient cause; for there is some difference between a blind impulse or force, and rationality. The mind is endowed with various appetites, passions, and desires,—with noble affections, and, above all,



with a feeling of moral approbation and disapprobation. These are not the “active principles,” or the “motive powers,” as they have been called; they are the ends of our acting: we simply act in order to gratify them. They exert no influence over the will, much less is the will controlled by them; and hence, we are perfectly free, to gratify the one or the other of them;—to act in obedience to the dictates of conscience, or in order to gratify the lowest appetites of our nature. We see that certain means









is also equally true of a volition. But is the mind nothing? Is the will nothing? Is a free, intelligent, designing cause nothing?

The mind is something; and it is capable of acting in order to fulfill its own designs, though it be not impelled to act. Is this idea absurd? Is it self-contradictory? Is it anything like the assertion, that an effect has no cause? It is not. It implies no contradiction;—it is a possible idea. How does it act, then? I do not know. This is a mystery. Indeed,







absurdity.

The philosophers of all ages have sought for the efficient cause of volition; but who has found it ? Is it in the will? The necessitarian has shown the absurdities of this hypothesis. Is it in the power of motive ? This hypothesis is fraught with the very same absurdities. Is it in the uncaused volition of Deity? The younger Edwards could do nothing with this hypothesis. In truth, the efficient cause of volition is nowhere. It truth never been found, because it does

not exist; and it never will be found, so long as an action of mind continues to be what it is.

This, then, is the true idea of a free-agent: it is one who, in view of circumstances, both external and internal, can act, without being efficiently caused to do so. This is the idea of a free-agent which God has realized by the creation of the soul of man. It may be a mystery ; but it is not a contradiction. It may be a mystery; but then it solves a thousand difficulties which we have



When confined within these limits, the principle or maxim in question is one of immense importance; and to disregard it betrays one of the greatest weaknesses to which the human mind is exposed. If we do not adhere to it, there is no resting-place for us this side of the most unqualified atheism: we shall be compelled to renounce, not only the stupendous facts and mysteries of revelation, but also all the great truths of natural religion. The very being and attributes of God







rise up out of nothing, and come into-being of itself, without any cause of its existence. These things are blended together, in the philosophy of the necessitarian, by a most convenient use of an ambiguous phraseology; but they are, indeed, as widely different from each other as mystery is from absurdity,—as light is from darkness.

But the above maxim, as I have already said, may be grievously misapplied; and thus the garb of intellectual humility may be thrown over the greatest











upon the mind, is not that effect merely a passive impression? Is it not absurd to suppose, that it is a passive impression, produced by the action of something else, and yet that it is an action of the mind itself? If so, and so I think it has been made to appear, then we not only should, but must, reject it. We must reject it, unless we suffer ourselves to be blinded by false analogies, and verbal ambiguities.

This is not to deny the divine influence, as has been so often imagined. The regeneration, the new

creation, of the soul, by the power of God, is no more inconsistent with free and accountable agency, than was the original creation of it with all its powers; but this cannot be said of the production of our acts or volitions by a divine influence. Those must take an exceedingly narrow and superficial view of the great work of regeneration, who suppose that it is altogether denied, unless we admit that the Spirit produces our volitions; who suppose that the divine agency can in no way cleanse and purify our powers, unless it can









## SECTION 18: OF THE TESTIMONY OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

WHETHER our volitions come to pass in the manner we call freely, or are brought to pass by the operation of necessary causes, is a question of fact, which should be referred to the tribunal of consciousness. If we ever hope to settle this question, we must occasionally turn from the arena of dialectics, and unite our efforts in the cultivation of the much-neglected field of

observation. We must turn from the dust and smoke of mere logical contention, and consult the living oracle within; we must behold the pure light that ever burns behind the darkened veil of disputation.

This appeal is not declined by the necessitarian. He consents to the appeal; and the dispute is, as to the true interpretation of the decision of the tribunal in question. We contend that the testimony of consciousness is clearly and unequivocally in



this subject, however, is sufficient to show with what faint hope of success the necessitarian can venture to submit his cause to the tribunal of consciousness.

The testimony of consciousness, I have no doubt, might have been made much stronger in our favour, if the wrong question had not been submitted to it. All the advocates of free-agency, so far as I remember, have said that we are conscious of freedom; that we are conscious of a power of contrary choice. Or, in















know, may make some imagine that volition has no cause, or that it produces itself.”

Our consciousness is precisely the same; but just observe how he interprets it. He finds himself possessed of a *volition*; but does he look at this volition to see what it is? Does he ask himself whether it is the same in nature and in kind with a produced effect? He does not. It is most unquestionably a produced effect; this is beyond all doubt, and it is taken for granted. He sees no effectual power by

which this volition is produced; *but he knows it is a produced effect*, and therefore he knows it must have a producing cause. The oracle is not consulted on this point at all. It would be an insult to reason to consult the great oracle of nature on so plain a point as this. This has been decided long ago, and the ear is deaf to any response that might possibly contravene so clear a decision. Thus it is that the necessitarian goes to the true oracle within, and delivers oracles himself.

He reasons not from the

observed, but from the assumed, nature of a volition. It must be an effect, says he, and though I do not see “the effectual power by which it is produced yet there must be such a power. Yes, it is just as absurd to suppose that it can exist, without being produced by the effectual power of something operating upon the mind, as it is to suppose that a world can create itself!

But as we appeal to consciousness, let us pay some little attention to its teaching. We find ourselves, then, possessed



volition is a produced effect. But is it such an effect? What says consciousness upon this point? We have already repeatedly seen, what every man may see, that a volition is not the passive result of any prior action; it is action itself. It is not a produced effect; it is a producing cause. It is not *determined* at all; it is simply a *determination*. As it stands out in the light of consciousness, it is as perfectly distinct from the idea of an effect, as any one thing can possibly be from another; and if it has not so









that which does not exist. But I will say, that as we are conscious of the existence of an act, so we see and do know that this is not a passive impression, or a produced effect. And as we are not compelled to act, so we know that we may act or may not act, so we know that our actions are not necessitated, but may be put forth or withheld. This is liberty, this is "a power of contrary choice." This idea of liberty, I say, follows from the fact of consciousness that we do act, by an inference as clear as











he was not conscious that a volition has *no producing* cause of its existence. Did he expect that we should prove the non-existence of a thing by the direct evidence of consciousness ? All that he could reasonably expect in such a case is, that we should not be conscious of any such influence; and this President Edwards himself admits. He admits, that we do not see the “effectual power of any cause,” or feel its influence, operating to produce a volition : he merely infers this from the assumption that volition is

a produced effect.

He also says, I find “that the acts of my will are my own; i. e. that they are acts of my will—the volitions of my own mind; or, in other words, that what I will, I will; which, I suppose, is the sum of what others experience in this affair.” Surely, no one was ever so silly as to deny that what a man wills, he wills; and if this is all that consciousness teaches on the subject, its information can throw no light upon this or upon any other controversy. This proposition, that a man

wills what he wills, is independent of all experience and all consciousness. It is an identical proposition, which experience can neither shake nor confirm. We may see, nay, we must see, that each and every thing in the universe is what it is, without any reference to consciousness or experience.

Indeed, it is as absurd to appeal to experience or consciousness for the truth of such a universal and self-evident axiom, as it is to appeal to universal and self-evident axioms, to























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